# THOUGHTS

ON

# Miracles in general, &c.

[Price Two Shillings.]

BRITISH MUSEUM

# THOUGHTS
ON
# MIRACLES
## IN GENERAL,

And as they relate to the

## Eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity

## IN PARTICULAR:

Interſperſed with REMARKS on

## BISHOP BUTLER's
## ANALOGY of RELIGION
with the COURSE of NATURE.

To which is added,

## The CREED of a real DEIST.

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LONDON:
Printed for T. BECKET, and P. A. DE HONDT, near Surry-Street, in the Strand.

M.DCC.LXVII.

# THOUGHTS
ON
# MIRACLES:
IN GENERAL,

And as they relate to the

Establishment of Christianity

IN PARTICULAR.

BRITISH MUSEUM

ANALOGY of RELIGION

with the COURSE of NATURE.

The CREED of a Half-Deist.

LONDON

# ADVERTISEMENT.

AN Engliſh tranſlation of J. J. ROUSSEAU's Miſcellaneous Works being lately publiſhed, and the Author of this little piece, finding in them a ſimilarity of ſentiments on the ſubject of Miracles with thoſe in the following ſheets, thinks proper to aſſure the Publick, that he had never ſeen ROUSSEAU's *Letters from the Mountains*, when his *Thoughts on Miracles* went to the preſs.

This little Tract hath lain by him a conſiderable time, and it is at the earneſt ſolicitation of ſome particular friends, that he now offers it to the Publick.

He congratulates himſelf, however, on having his opinions confirmed

firmed by ſo celebrated a writer; and flatters himſelf, from this circumſtance, that they are more worthy the attention of the Publick, than he could before be prevailed on to think they were.

To copy from ROUSSEAU, would be a proof of an Author's judgment in the choice of his model; but to find that he thinks like him, on ſo important a ſubject, muſt give an Author ſome pleaſing hopes that his work will be tolerably well received; though, at the ſame time, he is conſcious, that his manner of expreſſing his thoughts will bear no ſort of compariſon with that of this juſtly-admired writer.

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# THOUGHTS

ON

# Miracles in general, &c.

## CHAP. I.

### *Of Miracles, as defined by various Writers on the Subject.*

THE original meaning of the word *Miracle* ſeems to be, *ſomething wonderful*, much to be admired, and not readily to be accounted for in the ordinary courſe of things." In this ſenſe, many things were formerly deemed *miraculous*, which now ceaſe to be deemed ſo, from a more general knowledge of the laws of nature, and of the effects ariſing from a combination of mechanical powers.

But when we conſider the word *Miracle* in a religious ſenſe, it is thought, by different writers, to mean the *ſuſpending*, *evading*, *changing*, *contradicting*, *violating*, or *tranſgreſſing* the laws of nature.

The ingenious Mr. HUME adopts the term *tranſgreſſing*, and his opponent Dr. J. CAMPBELL ſuppoſes he does it, as expreſſive of a *criminal* breaking the eſtabliſhed laws of nature, and in order that *Miracles* might appear to be the more inconſiſtent with our ideas of infinite perfection. VOLTAIRE, and other writers againſt Miracles, make uſe of the term *violate*, perhaps with the ſame intention.

Writers in favour of *Chriſtianity* generally ſtile a *Miracle*, the *ſuſpending*, *changing*, or *contradicting* the eſtabliſhed laws of nature.

FLEETWOOD, who publiſhed an Eſſay on *Miracles*, in 1702, ſays, that "a *Miracle* is an extraordinary operation of "God, *againſt* the known courſe, and "ſettled laws of nature, appealing to the "ſenſes;" and that let a thing be ever ſo wonderful, or uncommon, if no eſtabliſhed

law of nature appears to be subverted by it, we are not to account it a *Miracle*.

This author does not allow (though the ſcripture implies as much, Matth. xii. 27.) that evil ſpirits can perform real Miracles; or that they can ſo far deceive the ſenſes, as to impoſe falſe Miracles on us for true, provided we make a proper uſe of our ſenſes. He reaſons thus: "By the *Senſes* "alone we are to judge of Miracles; and "therefore if *theſe* may be deceived by "falſe appearance, all diſtinction between "true and falſe Miracles would be ſub-"verted: for if a falſe Miracle can deceive "the ſenſes, it will have the ſame effect "as a true one."

The learned and judicious Bp. BUTLER, in page 240 of his *Analogy*, ſays, that "a *Miracle*, in its very notion, is relative "to a courſe of nature, and implies ſome-"what different from it, conſidered "as being ſo." All who believe *Miracles*, allow that they are particular interpoſitions of divine power, contrary to the ordinary courſe of nature.

If the word *Miracle* has only its original ſignification, and means no more than a thing *admirable, wonderful,* and not eaſily to be accounted for; then, almoſt every thing we ſee is *miraculous.* In this ſenſe, we cannot open our eyes without diſcovering ſtanding *Miracles,* or evidences of infinite power, wiſdom and goodneſs, which, if duly attended to, will lead us directly to the knowledge of God and of his attributes.* Now many have thought, that ſuch knowledge alone is a proper foundation for true religion, as well as for the practice of every ſocial virtue; and hence, that no other evidences, beſides theſe, can be *neceſſary* to teach mankind their duty to God, and to their fellow creatures; as theſe duties, *naturally,* ariſe out of the relations which we ſtand in to God, and to one another; and are clearly diſcoverable by the light of nature, without the aſſiſtance of particular interpoſitions.

The learned Dr. CAMPBELL, mentioned above, who lately wrote a very ſenſible and ſpirited anſwer to Mr. HUME's Eſſay on Miracles,

* See Zal. in Stob.

Miracles, undertakes to prove, that Miracles were wrought by God, long before the eſtabliſhment of *Chriſtianity*; and inſtances the creation of the world, as being *miraculous*: yet at the ſame time he ſeems doubtful whether the formation of the world may, *with ſtrict propriety*, be deemed a Miracle. Bp. BUTLER alſo ſays, that "he will not contend, what the courſe of "nature is on the firſt peopling of worlds, "or whether the revelation made to mankind at that time may, with propriety, "be deemed *miraculous*."

Indeed, if, as the good Biſhop ſays above, "a *Miracle*, in its very notion, be relative "to a courſe of nature, and implies ſomewhat different from it;" or, as Mr. FLEETWOOD ſays, is "an extraordinary "operation of God, *againſt* the known "courſe, and ſettled laws of nature, appealing to the ſenſes;" then, *Creation* cannot, with propriety, be deemed a *Miracle*; becauſe there were, at that time, no courſe, nor law of nature eſtabliſhed; nor any ſenſes to appeal to.

When we ſpeak of the laws, the known, eſtabliſhed laws of nature, we evidently mean, the laws, or courſe of nature eſtabliſhed, by God, in this world. Now the laws of nature, relative to this world, could not be *ſuſpended* or *altered* by the making, or peopling of it; and, of courſe, *theſe* cannot be ſtiled *Miracles*, agreeably to FLEETWOOD's, BUTLER's, or CAMPBELL's definition of a Miracle: notwithſtanding which, the two laſt-named writers aſſert, that there muſt have been *Miracles* in former times. Indeed, if this had been *proved*, as well as aſſerted; if the *creation* of a world, the *peopling* of it, and the *giving laws to ſuch world*, could be proved to be *miraculous*; the argument to prove that Miracles have never been wrought, muſt fall to the ground; as *whatever has been, may be again.* But theſe things cannot be *miraculous*, agreeably to the common definition of a *Miracle* when applied to religious purpoſes; nor does there appear to be any proof, ſeparate from human teſtimony, that God ever did ſuſpend, alter, or contradict any of the eſtabliſhed laws of nature.

That

That the world had a beginning, and that mankind were originally produced in a way different from what they are now produced, are truths too evident to admit of a diſpute; and *theſe* form ſome of the cleareſt proofs of the exiſtence of an infinite intelligence, or firſt cauſe of all things: for though the *Sceptic* may argue, that it is as eaſy to ſuppoſe all things to have exiſted from eternity, in the manner they now exiſt, as it is to ſuppoſe a Being exiſting from eternity, which produced them; yet that perſon muſt give up all pretenſions to reaſon and philoſophy, who could ſuppoſe that mankind were, from eternity, produced in a way of human generation; for it implies a contradiction.

*Human generation* appears to be a law of nature, eſtabliſhed by God in this world; and cannot with propriety be called a *Miracle*: but if God was pleaſed to ſuſpend this law, and again produce mankind in the way he at firſt produced them, this would be truly a *Miracle*.

When the almighty, infinitely wiſe, and good Being forms a ſyſtem, or world,

he doubtleſs eſtabliſhes laws, both natural and moral, for the government of that ſyſtem, or world; and theſe will, probably, be very different from the laws of another ſyſtem.

*Gravitation* and *attraction* appear to be natural laws of this material ſyſtem, but cannot appear to be natural laws, in a world of immaterial, or ſpiritual beings. In ſuch a ſyſtem, or world, the introduction of matter would be a *Miracle*, under every definition of the word.

Upon the whole, I think it will be allowed, that the laws of an infinitely perfect Being muſt be ſuited to anſwer all the purpoſes of his government, both natural and moral, in every world that he has formed; nor do particular interpoſitions appear to be neceſſary, under the government of a Being infinitely powerful, wiſe and good. But this I ſhall endeavour farther to make appear in the following chapter.

## CHAP. II.

### *Of the Improbability of* Miracles, *if conſidered agreeeably to the Definition of a* Miracle, when *applied to Religion.*

IN the concluſion of the preceding chapter, I have ventured to ſuppoſe, that *miraculous interpoſitions* cannot be neceſſary under the government of a Being infinitely powerful, wiſe, and good: my reaſons for it will now follow.

The laws of God muſt, like himſelf, be perfect; and therefore can never be altered for the better. This ſeems to be a preſumptive proof, that they never have been, and that they never will be, altered.

The laws of God being, like himſelf, *perfect*, we may reaſonably ſuppoſe that they are alſo, like himſelf, *immutable*; and therefore cannot be *evaded*, *ſuſpended*, or *altered*, by any other being, nor even by God himſelf, without implying imperfection, either in him, or in his laws; which cannot be ſuppoſed of an infinite, ſelf-

exiſtent Being; any more than it can be ſuppoſed, that he can change himſelf, and become leſs wiſe, leſs powerful, leſs good, leſs immutable, and leſs perfect, than he is by the intrinſic neceſſity of his nature.

To ſay, that God may find it neceſſary, upon particular occaſions, to interfere and ſuſpend, or alter, any of his eſtabliſhed, and general laws, is ſpeaking of infinite perfection in a way very unbecoming ſuch creatures as we are. I own, that nothing ſhort of *infinite perfection* could poſſibly frame *general laws*, which would eternally anſwer the purpoſes of the government of intelligent, and free beings, without alteration or amendment by particular interpoſitions: but to ſay that *God cannot* do this, is abſurd, if not wicked; and to aſſert that he *has not* done this, is aſſerting more than can poſſibly be proved; for what we think to be particular interpoſitions, may be far from being ſuch.

If the eſtabliſhed, general laws of God are to be varied, in order to ſuit or accommodate them to the actions of creatures; they cannot, like himſelf, be perfect, and

immutable, but become dependent on the actions of finite and precarious beings.

But to ſuppoſe, that there ever can be a neceſſity for particular interpoſitions, implies either a want of foreſight, or a want of power in God, to frame his laws in ſuch manner as to anſwer the infinitely wiſe purpoſes of his government, in all the worlds he has made.

We can hardly have an idea of God's ſuſpending, evading, or changing, any of his general laws, without, at the ſame time, conceiving, that the actions of creatures, and not *the eternal, unalterable fitneſs of things*, determined his conduct: and yet there is great reaſon to believe, and it is the opinion of ſome of the beſt writers, that "the *moral fitneſs and unfitneſs* of "actions, are prior to *all will* whatever." See page 418 of BUTLER's *Analogy* (where he goes on and ſays) "which I appre-"hend as certainly to determine the di-"vine conduct, as ſpeculative truth and "falſhood neceſſarily determine the di-"vine judgment." And in page 419, this learned author ſays, that "there is in the

"nature

" nature of things an original *ſtandard of* " *right and wrong* in actions, independent " of all will; but which unalterably de- " termines the will of God, to exerciſe " that moral government over the world " which religion teaches." The ſame author ſays, in page 190 of the work above quoted; " and there would indeed be rea- " ſon to wiſh, which, by the way, is very " different from a right to claim, *that all* " *irregularities were prevented, or remedied,* " *by preſent interpoſitions*, if theſe interpo- " ſitions would have no other effect than " this: but it is plain that they would have " ſome viſible and immediate *bad* effect; " for inſtance, they would encourage *idle-* " *neſs* and *negligence*, and they would *ren-* " *der doubtful the natural rule of life*; which " is aſcertained by this very thing, that " the courſe of the world is carried on by " general laws." Again, in page 191, he ſays, " we find that interpoſitions would " *produce evil and prevent good*, and, for " aught we know, they would produce " *greater evil* than they would prevent, and " prevent *greater good* than they would " produce." How-

However, it muſt be owned, that the good Biſhop ſpeaks here of the *natural government* of the world; for when he comes to ſpeak of the *moral* government of God, and looks on *revelation* to be a part of the plan of his moral government, then he admits of *particular interpoſitions*, and ſuppoſes them *neceſſary*: notwithſtanding (in page 183 of the ſame much-admired performance) he connects the natural and moral government of the world into one plan or ſyſtem, and, ſeemingly, contradicts himſelf: for if the *natural* rule of life might be *rendered doubtful* by particular interpoſitions, which he ſays it would; ſurely the *moral* rule, which he ſays ariſes out of the natural, and is connected with it, may alſo be rendered doubtful, and mankind would have no rule left to be depended on. Indeed, I have no idea of a *natural* rule of life, or of any rule of life, but what ariſes out of the relations which intelligent beings ſtand in to God, and to one another; and hence it appears to me, that every rule of life muſt be *moral*; and if *the rule be rendered doubtful by particular interpoſitions*,

ent, such interpositions must, as the Bishop says, "produce evil, greater evil than they "would prevent, and prevent greater good "than they would produce." I confess that I did not expect this from the pen of a *Bishop*; because, if true, it is an unanswerable argument against *Miracles, the principal evidences of the supernatural doctrines of Christianity*. But truth and reason are not to be stifled, unless it be in ignorant, bigotted, and bad hearts. But to proceed.

VOLTAIRE says, in his *Dict. Phil.* lately published, that "a *Miracle* is a viola"tion of laws mathematical, divine, "immutable, eternal." By this definition, "a *Miracle* is a contradiction in terms, it "being impossible that a law can, at the "same time, be immutable, and violated; "impossible that an infinitely-wise being "should make laws and then violate them." Other authors have asserted, that the laws of nature, being the laws of God, are as unchangeable as he himself is. The reason of this arises from the acknowledged perfection of all his laws, and the manifest

impossi-

impoſſibility of altering them for the better, ſeeing that his *power*, *wiſdom*, and *goodneſs* muſt be eternally the ſame.

Other authors, beſides VOLTAIRE, have aſſerted the impoſſibility of God's working a *Miracle*, agreeably to the above definition of it, when applied to religious purpoſes. I will not go ſo far as to aſſert, that it is *impoſſible* for God to ſuſpend, or alter the laws of nature; nor can any one elſe mean it, as relative to his power; yet I think I may venture to ſay, that it is highly *improbable*, and inconſiſtent with our ideas of infinite perfection, to ſuppoſe, that he would frame laws which the actions of inferior beings might render it neceſſary for him to alter.

Thoſe who aſſert the *impoſſibility* of Miracles, mean only a *moral* impoſſibility, ariſing from the perfection of God's nature; for it would be ridiculous to ſay that *God could not, if he pleaſed, miraculouſly ſuſpend the law of gravitation for inſtance*: he certainly wants not power to do this; yet, morally ſpeaking, it is impoſſible that he ſhould do it. Juſt in the ſame ſenſe as we

ſay,

ſay, it is impoſſible for God to *contradict himſelf*; which he would appear to do, if he was to act contrary to any of the laws of nature, that he himſelf had eſtabliſhed, by any miraculous interpoſition. In this ſenſe, I ſay, it appears to be *morally impoſſible* that a *Miracle* ſhould ever be wrought, even by God himſelf; and every other being muſt neceſſarily want *power* to do it.

But the principal argument made uſe of in favour of *particular interpoſitions* has been, that of our being *free*; for that *general laws cannot be ſuppoſed to be ſufficient for the government of free beings*.

To this argument, a very ſhort reply might be made; namely, that if *general laws* are not ſufficient for the government of *free beings*, no other laws can be ſo; for *particular interpoſitions* muſt deſtroy that *freedom*, if they ſo far affect human actions, as to *prevent* what would otherwiſe have been done by ſuch beings; and if they fall ſhort of this, they appear to anſwer no end in the moral world.

Again;

Again; if *miraculous interpositions* are ever neceſſary in the government of free beings, why are they not always neceſſary, or as neceſſary at one time as at another time? After all; ſurely every one, who has juſt and proper notions of God and of his attributes, muſt allow, that the almighty governor of the univerſe could, if he pleaſed, frame ſome general laws, which would eternally anſwer the purpoſes of his government of free beings. One ſuch eternal, immutable law, it appears to me, that he has eſtabliſhed univerſally, namely, *that virtuous actions ſhall, upon the whole, be rewarded, and vicious actions be puniſhed*; or, in other words, that *virtue and happineſs, vice and miſery, are, in general, connected, and follow one another, like cauſe and effect*. Bp. BUTLER ſeems to be of this opinion, when he ſays, in page 53 of his *Analogy*, that "the connection of "virtue and happineſs, vice and miſery, is "one of God's *general laws*, and is as great "a proof of our being under his govern-"ment, as if he declared it by a voice from "heaven." To confirm this opinion, and farther to ſhew that God has, originally,

done every thing for the happineſs of his creatures, which they could reaſonably expect, I quote him again in page 167, where this learned author ſays, "that the dictates of our *moral faculty*, which are, "by nature, a rule to us, are moreover "*the laws of God.*" Here the good Biſhop, again, gives up the neceſſity of particular interpoſitions; for if the *moral faculty*, as he is pleaſed to call it, or *conſcience*, or *reaſon*, or *light within*, or whatever others call it, which the author of our beings hath implanted in our natures, and interwoven in our very frame; I ſay, if the dictates of this moral faculty, "are by nature a "rule to us, and are moreover *the laws of* "*God*;" then ſurely the rule muſt be *perfect*, and ſufficient at all times to anſwer the wiſe purpoſes of God's government of mankind. For if we ſuppoſe, that any alteration of this rule can be neceſſary; or that it may be ſufficient at one time, and not ſufficient at another time; it would, in fact, be no rule at all, to be depended on. But if *the law in our minds*, is alſo *the law of God*; ſuch law muſt be *perfect*, as all God's

God's laws are. If, as this great writer ſuppoſes, "there is, *in the nature of things*, "an original ſtandard of right and wrong "in actions independent on all will, but "which unalterably determines the will "of God;" ſurely we may reaſonably ſuppoſe, that this ſame ſtandard muſt be the rule of our conduct, and ought, as far as we can judge of it, invariably to determine our actions. But man being imperfect, and at the ſame time *free*; the dictates of his *moral faculty* are not always attended to, nor made the invariable rule of his conduct. We often are hurried away and tranſported by the violence of our paſſions, through which the gentle light of reaſon is greatly clouded; till at length, the paſſions ſubſiding, it again ſhines forth and re-illuminates the ſoul. Sometimes, indeed, we ſlothfully reſign ourſelves to the ſuggeſtions of artful and wicked men, either terrified by their threats, or duped by their ſophiſtry; and this will be the caſe, both in religion and government, as long as the world endures, and wicked men exiſt; for this is the natural conſequence of our *freedom*

and our *frailty*; of the weakneſs of ſome, and the wickedneſs of others.

God, from the perfection of his nature, cannot poſſibly deviate from the original ſtandard of right and wrong, *in the nature of things*; but his imperfect creature, man, being left free, will ever be liable to error.

I know that ſome will not allow, with the good Bp. BUTLER, that there is "an "original ſtandard, in the nature of "things, determining the will of God;" becauſe, ſay they, it ſeems to deſtroy the freedom of his actions: yet, ſurely, it is the perfection, and glory of God's nature, that he cannot poſſibly act wrong; for though, as to his power, he can do *every thing*, yet his wiſdom and goodneſs render it *morally impoſſible* that he ſhould *do evil*.

The *freedom* of intelligent beings, which, of courſe, renders them liable to error, ſeems to be, alſo, one of God's general laws, which cannot, *in the nature of things*, be evaded, ſuſpended, or altered: *freedom*, as a late author has obſerved,* *being a neceſſary adjunct of intelligence*. Though

* See *The Morality of the New Teſtament*, &c. p. 199, note.

Though the *Bishop of Gloucester*, in his *Doctrine of Grace*, allows of external, miraculous interpositions; yet he seems to think that God might, by an immediate application to the mind of man, answer all the purposes of altering any of his general laws. Whether even this can be *necessary* in God's government of mankind, I will not undertake to determine; but even such an interposition appears to be a subversion of one of his general laws, namely, the *freedom of intelligent beings*.

Upon the whole; these laws of God, namely, *the connection of virtue and happiness, vice and misery*; and the necessary dictates of our moral faculty or conscience; appear to be calculated, by infinite wisdom, for the government of *free beings*, and to preclude miraculous interpositions.

Thus much for *Miracles* in general; let us now consider them as relative to the establishment of *Christianity*.

## CHAP. III.

*MIRACLES incapable of proof from* Teſtimony, *becauſe their Effects are incommunicable.*

ADMITTING, for argument ſake, that *Miracles* may have been wrought, and that they might have a ſurprizing effect on thoſe who ſee them wrought, yet they do not ſeem calculated to enforce univerſal belief; unleſs they were univerſally wrought, and in the ſight of every perſon whoſe ſalvation is ſaid to depend on the belief of doctrines which the Miracles were intended to eſtabliſh; if the ſalvation of any one may be ſaid ſo to do.

Whatever effect a *Miracle* might have on thoſe who ſaw it performed, this effect cannot be communicated to others: thoſe who ſaw it wrought, muſt be differently affected from thoſe who have only read or heard of it; and if differently affected, that is, if ſeeing the Miracle performed, will operate more forcibly, and have a greater in-

fluence in procuring the belief of doctrines, the belief of which is ſuppoſed to be neceſſary to ſalvation; then thoſe who ſee a Miracle performed, muſt have the advantage of thoſe who only read or hear of it: but yet, not a ſingle reaſon can be aſſigned, why all mankind, as the offspring of infinite goodneſs, as creatures of the ſame ſpecies, and ſtanding in the ſame relation to God, ſhould not be upon the ſame footing in regard to the final happineſs of their *immortal parts*; whatever accidental difference there may be here, in reſpect to their mental, or bodily endowments: nor does it appear, that ſuch difference in mental and bodily endowments is any proof, from analogy, that God has given one perſon any advantage above another, in regard to the happineſs, the eternal happineſs of their ſouls, by any partial or particular interpoſition in their favour.

How any one, who believes a final ſtate of eternal happineſs and miſery, can ſuppoſe this, I am at a loſs to determine; I ſay, how this can be ſuppoſed of that infinitely benevolent being, who is no re-

ſpecter of perſons, but is willing that all ſhould be finally happy, I cannot comprehend; notwithſtanding the good Bp. BUTLER has brought accidental diſtinctions in the natural world, as a proof, from analogy, that God may be more kind to one man, or to one body of men, than to another, with reſpect to their *eternal happineſs*.

It is certainly inconſiſtent with our ideas of infinite goodneſs, to ſuppoſe that God has placed any one intelligent being in ſo unhappy a ſituation, as to have no opportunity of knowing his duty, at leaſt ſo much of it as is *neceſſary to his ſalvation*.

Can it be, rationally, ſuppoſed, that the kind parent of the univerſe would exert his omnipotence, miraculouſly ſuſpend the laws of nature, and interpoſe in favour of one ſmall part of his creation, whilſt, at the ſame time, he left the other parts deſtitute of his fatherly care and protection, and liable to periſh everlaſtingly, for want of that aſſiſtance which he afforded to that ſmall part? Can any thing in nature be found analogous to this? ſurely no. And yet, if the *peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity*



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are of such vast advantage to those who are interested in them; and if the universal light of nature be insufficient to answer God's benevolent intention, namely, the happiness of his creatures; I say, if this be true, then he is certainly more benevolent to *Christians* than to the far greatest part of the rest of the world, in regard to their *eternal salvation*; and this is an affair of such vast importance, that the distinctions of this world will bear no analogy or comparison with it.

I confess, I cannot help thinking, that God has given to *all* mankind equal opportunities in regard to their *eternal happiness*, whatever accidental distinctions we may see in this short and precarious state of existence.

*Christians* are so partial to themselves, or think God so partial to them, as to believe that *Miracles* have been wrought in confirmation of the *Jewish* and *Christian* systems only. Yet all religions present to *Miracles*, of one kind or other; and some religious systems have spread wider, and been more generally believed, than the system called

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the *Chriſtian religion*. Indeed, pure, genuine, rational Chriſtianity, appears to have but few votaries; and very few of thoſe appear to embrace it on account of the *Miracles* ſaid to be wrought in confirmation of it. The rationality of its moral doctrines, and the happineſs conſequent on the belief and practice of them, are better reaſons for its being embraced by men of underſtanding, than *Miracles* can afford. As to the bulk of the Chriſtian world, they embrace it, merely, becauſe it is the eſtabliſhed religion of the country in which they happened to be born; for theſe can give no other reaſon for their faith.

I may, probably, be told, that my laſt argument is far from *new*. I acknowledge it: but at the ſame time I declare, that I never yet met with a ſatisfactory anſwer to it, and therefore think I may fairly urge it again.

The anſwer to it, which Bp. BUTLER draws from analogy, has, I hope, been proved to be weak and inconcluſive: and I yet think, that it is having a more exalted idea of the divine Being, to ſuppoſe he never

never does interfere at all; but governs his creatures by general laws, ſuited to the various relations they ſtand in to him and to one another; than that he ſhould be ſo far a *reſpecter of perſons*, as partially to interfere in favour of one part of mankind, and neglect the reſt, in their religious concerns at leaſt, as unworthy of his paternal regard. This, therefore, will remain an objection to *particular interpoſitions*, till a better anſwer is given to it than Bp. BUTLER has drawn *from the analogy of religion with the courſe of nature.*

But before I conclude this head, I ſhall juſt remark, that *Chriſtians* allow of *real Miracles* having been wrought to *eſtabliſh* the *Jewiſh* religion; and alſo allow of *Miracles* being wrought in the Chriſtian diſpenſation, in order to *aboliſh* the ceremonial part, at leaſt, of the Jewiſh ſyſtem. Is not this repreſenting the infinitely perfect God, as being perfectly capricious; as working Miracles to eſtabliſh a religious ſyſtem, and again working Miracles to aboliſh it? What an idea does this give us of infinite wiſdom? Is this much

better

better than *Atheism* itself? But to return.

Whatever *Miracles* may do to influence the conduct of those who see them wrought, they do not, as I said above, appear calculated to establish any *general religious system*, unless they were to be universally wrought, and often repeated, or that some one *standing Miracle* was to be wrought, that would have the same effect upon the most distant generations, as *Miracles* had upon those who were present to hear the doctrines and precepts of such religion originally delivered. I think it may be easily conceived, that God, if he pleased, and saw that particular interpositions were fit and necessary, could establish some standing *Miracle*, which would, in all ages, be sufficient evidence of, and procure credence to, the Miracles said to be wrought by Christ and his apostles; which would at once destroy every argument that has been, or might be produced to prove, that God never does work local Miracles.

Some have thought, that, as the doctrines and precepts of Christianity are written in a book, the belief of their divinity would

would be sufficiently ascertained, if, by a continued *Miracle*, this book were to be distinguished from all others; and that every true and genuine book of this kind might always bear upon it some mark or token of its coming from God; to the end that it might appear, as Bp. BUTLER styles it, "an authoritative publication of *natural religion*." See page 212 of his *Analogy*.

If a *Miracle* was, originally, the *seal of Heaven*, and wrought to engage the attention and belief of mankind in general; surely it is easy to suppose, that the same seal might be affixed to every genuine book of this sort, in order to engage, in like manner, the attention and belief of after ages; and thereby put all mankind upon an equal footing, in regard to their *religious concerns*, at least: but as this is not done, we have reason to suppose that the subversion of the *general laws* of God, by particular interpositions, is inconsistent with his attributes.

Mr. HUME, and others, have spoken of *greater* and *lesser* Miracles: but certainly every

every act of *omnipotence* muſt be equally eaſy. It muſt be as eaſy for God to make a million of creatures, as one creature; a million of worlds, as one world. It muſt be as eaſy for God to create an archangel, as to create a fly. This being the caſe, it cannot appear difficult for God, if he pleaſed or ſaw fit, to render every true and genuine ſcripture *unalterable* by human folly or fraud; and to have ſecured it in ſuch manner, that neither alteration of opinion, change of language, nor accident, nor *time* itſelf, the great deſtroyer of all things, could have rendered doubtful, or unintelligible, any neceſſary truth.

Upon the whole, it does not appear rational to ſuppoſe that God would, originally, work *Miracles* to confirm the *divinity* of a certain religious ſyſtem, and then leave it to be corrupted, as the intereſt, folly or wickedneſs of man ſhould deviſe. Nay, ſome have gone ſo far as to ſuppoſe, that if *Chriſtianity* had been intended to be the univerſal religion of the world, it, together with its records, would have been *miraculouſly preſerved* in its original purity; but

that

that altered, and adulterated as it appears to be at preſent, it is morally impoſſible that it ſhould be univerſally received, as the pure and perfect word of God; or be a *religious rule, perfect in its direction for the conduct of human life.*

If the happineſs of mankind depended on the belief and practice of the doctrines and precepts contained in the *Bible*, what could be more worthy the exertion of infinite power, than to preſerve and ſecure this *book* from miſtakes and corruptions? That there are miſtakes in it, is generally allowed; for inſtance, Bp. BUTLER ſays, in page 389 of his *Analogy*, "There may "be miſtakes of tranſcribers; there may "be other *real* or *ſeeming* miſtakes, not "eaſy to be, particularly, accounted for; "but there are, certainly, *no more* things "of this kind in the *ſcriptures*, than what "were to have been expected in books of "ſuch antiquity." Here again, the good Biſhop, as uſual, compares things that are allowed to be of infinite concern, with things of no moment. Surely one might reaſonably expect, not only that there would

be

be *no more* mistakes, but that there would not be *so many* in *inspired writings*, as in other books of antiquity; nay, one would rather suppose that there would be none at all; and that if ever God does interpose, he might be supposed to do it, in order to prevent mistakes in the one, whilst the other might be left to the common course of things. Here again the Bishop's *Analogy* fails.

Partial, local, and temporary *Miracles*, wrought at any particular time or place, do not appear calculated to establish an *universal* religion, or a religion essential to the happiness of mankind in general. Though a *Miracle* might strike the minds of the beholders with astonishment, and greatly affect the passions of those who saw it performed; yet this effect cannot be communicated by the relation of a *Miracle* having been wrought. Every one may perceive this, and experience manifests, that we can sit coolly and hear things related, whilst the sight of their operation would greatly affect our passions, and put

us into violent and diſagreeable agitations. But farther—

It is impoſſible for any, beſides thoſe who ſaw a Miracle performed, to be ſure that it *was* performed; unleſs, as Mr. HUME obſerves, it would be a *Miracle* for the relater of a Miracle to lie. Beſides,

A falſe *Miracle*, if it deceives the ſenſes, will have the ſame effect as a *true* one. Hence many things have been thought, by the vulgar, to be *miraculous*, which men of underſtanding have deſpiſed; finding them to be only the tricks and juggles of artful and deſigning men, and by no means *miraculous*, in a religious ſenſe: yet the vulgar are as poſitive about ſuch *Miracles*, and hand them down to poſterity with the ſame aſſurance, as if they had been *real*, and that ſome of the eſtabliſhed laws of nature had been ſuſpended, or altered, in order to produce them. Such artifice, and deception, we know, have often been practiſed in the Romiſh church, and amongſt her credulous *devotees*. Thoſe then who believe they ſaw a real Miracle, may be miſtaken; but it is impoſſible for thoſe who did not

ſee it, to be abſolutely certain that there ever was one performed; unleſs, as I ſaid above, it be impoſſible for a man, or a number of men, to lie, or to be miſtaken. In ſhort, the evidence of teſtimony in regard to *miraculous interpoſitions* cannot, readily, be admitted: a *Miracle*, according to FLEETWOOD and others, being *an appeal to the ſenſes of particular perſons, and not to the reaſon of mankind in general.*

Indeed, how far we may by our *reaſon* or by our *ſenſes* be able to diſtinguiſh between *real Miracles* (agreeably to the above definition of a Miracle when applied to religion) and the ſurpriſing effect produced by a combination of mechanical powers, I leave the intelligent reader to judge for himſelf; only reminding him, that the whole extent of the laws and powers of nature may be yet unknown to any human being,* and that we cannot poſſibly be abſolutely

* Late diſcoveries ſeem to countenance this opinion, and we are almoſt confirmed in it, when we conſider, that what, in one age, hath been deemed a *ſuſpenſion*, or *contradiction* of the laws and powers of nature and truly *miraculous*, hath been found in another, more enlight-

abſolutely certain, when an effect is produced, whether it be produced by powers *in nature*, or by powers *out of, or above nature*; and the latter it muſt be, to conſtitute a *Miracle* as defined above.

## CHAP. IV.

*MIRACLES, as they relate to the eſtabliſhment of a religious ſyſtem, require a different kind of evidence from common hiſtorical facts.*

NOtwithſtanding all that has been ſaid, by Chriſtian divines, and others, to prove that the ſame kind of evidence which we have of common hiſtorical facts, ſhould



enlightened by philoſophy and experience, to be produced either by a more extenſive knowledge of nature's powers, and the art of combining their force; or elſe by confederacy and juggle, the ſource of almoſt all the Miracles performed, or ſaid to be performed, in the Romiſh church.—Upon the whole, if it be true that *the full extent of the powers of nature may be yet unknown to mankind*, and that it muſt be ſome act, *out of, or above, or controuling the powers of nature*, to *conſtitute a Miracle, in the religious ſenſe of the word*; then the argument is at an end, and what we call *Miracles* prove nothing *ſupernatural*.

be deemed ſufficient in regard to miracles; it ſtill appears to me, that, in a matter of ſuch great importance, on which we are taught to believe that *our eternal happineſs depends*, we ſurely might reaſonably expect a different kind of evidence, from what we have of common hiſtorical occurrences.

The evidence of hiſtory, as to any of the common occurrences of life, may reaſonably be deemed ſufficient; becauſe it is often, nay, generally, very immaterial whether they are true, or falſe; eſpecially if they be tranſactions of very antient date, and with which we cannot be ſuppoſed to have any material concern. But ſurely the caſe is widely different in regard to *Miracles* ſaid to be wrought in confirmation of a religious ſyſtem, the truth of which we are to believe, *or to be finally unhappy*.

For inſtance: that there was ſuch a perſon as JULIUS CÆSAR, we readily believe, upon the credit of hiſtory. This is a common hiſtorical fact, of antient date, and with

with which mankind, in this age, can have but very little to do; nor can it be very material, whether it be true or falſe: the ſalvation of no one depends upon the *belief* or *diſbelief* of it, and therefore the fact is not examined with that ſcrupulous nicety and exactneſs, which ought always to be uſed in religious concerns; and hence it is believed, upon the ſimple teſtimony of hiſtorians. In like manner, and upon the ſame teſtimony, we, as readily, believe that there was ſuch a perſon as *Jeſus Chriſt*, and that he was crucified at *Jeruſalem*. Theſe facts hiſtory might ſufficiently aſcertain, and hence it would be ridiculous to diſpute them. But when we come to be told, that we are not only to believe that there was ſuch a perſon as *Jeſus Chirſt*, but that our eternal ſalvation depends on our believing him to be the *Son of God*, in that peculiar and diſtinguiſhed ſenſe, in which our church ſuppoſes him to be ſo; as likewiſe, *that he was born of a virgin, that he is equal with the Father, very God of very God*, and that there were many *miraculous events* attending his appearance in the

world; I ſay, when all this, taken together, is required to be believed as neceſſary to ſalvation; we cannot, we ought not, to be ſatisfied with the ſame kind of evidence, as would have been deemed ſufficient in regard only to his bare appearance in the world, to his being crucified at *Jeruſalem*, and to his being a preacher of *morality*, notwithſtanding what divines may ſay to the contrary. Events which happen in the ordinary courſe of nature, and events which cannot be, without altering the courſe of nature, certainly require different kind of evidence. This is ſo clear, that I ſhall not dwell long upon the argument.

The bare teſtimony of any man, who is not noted for a common liar, will be deemed ſufficient to determine our belief of any common matter; but ſo ſoon as a man begins to relate ſtrange and wonderful things, we begin to doubt his veracity. Let him go farther, and aſſert that he ſaw ſome of the eſtabliſhed laws of nature ſubverted, and we immediately look on him with contempt, and account him an egregious liar. Indeed, let a man's character for veracity be

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ever ſo well eſtabliſhed, his bare ſingle teſtimony ſhould not be deemed ſufficient to eſtabliſh the belief of a *Miracle*. Mr. HUME ſays, in his Eſſay on Miracles, that "No teſtimony is ſufficient to eſtabliſh a Miracle, "unleſs the teſtimony be of ſuch a kind, "that its falſehood would be more miraculous, than the fact which it endeavours to eſtabliſh; and even in that caſe, "there is a mutual deſtruction of argument, and the *ſuperior* only gives us an "aſſurance ſuitable to that degree of force "which remains after deducting the *inferior*."

In religious concerns, above all others, we ſhould be extremely cautious what we believe. We ſhould examine with candor and impartiality, yet, at the ſame time, with the moſt ſcrupulous exactneſs, all things that are offered to us as creeds, or articles of faith: but it is to be lamented, that inſtead of being more careful in religious concerns, we are much leſs ſo, than in the common affairs of life. In worldly buſineſs, men, in general, exert themſelves, take pains, and guard, with the utmoſt

care and circumſpection, againſt being cheated; more eſpecially, when they have to do with perſons who appear to have an intereſt in deceiving them. We are then extremely cautious how we take their words; we examine for ourſelves; we compare circumſtances and things, and always require as good a proof as the nature of the caſe will admit of: but if it will not admit of ſufficient proof, we reject it with contempt. On the other hand, in the important concerns of religion, we lazily and ſtupidly depend on what we are told by others, even by thoſe who have an apparent intereſt in deceiving us; and thus we do much leſs in the cauſe of religion, than in our worldly affairs: we adopt creeds and articles of faith, without examining them, or requiring any proof of their authenticity: and to ſave ourſelves trouble, we *profeſs* to *believe*, what it is impoſſible that we can *believe*, in the proper ſenſe of the word *belief*, becauſe we cannot poſſibly know any thing about it. In worldly buſineſs, it would be impoſſible to perſuade a man to believe that four pounds and two pounds make

make but five pounds; but in religious affairs, many ſenſible men *profeſs* to believe what is equally abſurd. Let us only act with the ſame caution, and require the ſame kind of proof, in the great concerns of religion, as we do in common buſineſs, and we ſhall ſeldom, or never, be deceived.

If we ſhould be told, that we can have no *proof* in religious matters; that we cannot comprehend them; that we cannot judge for ourſelves; and yet, *that it is our duty to* believe *what we are taught concerning them*; the perſon aſſerting this, ſurely deſerves to be treated with contempt and diſregard: for nothing in nature can be more evident, than that it never can be our *duty* to give our aſſent to the truth of propoſitions and doctrines, which we cannot underſtand: nay, it is out of our power to *believe what we cannot comprehend*; and God will not require of his creatures, what they cannot perform.

That men will lie; nay, that collective bodies of men have, in all ages, endeavoured to impoſe falſehood for truth, and to deceive their fellow-creatures in their

*religious*

*religious* concerns; will, I believe, be generally allowed: hence then, *human teſtimony* cannot be ſufficient to eſtabliſh the belief of a *Miracle*; for it is a thouſand times more probable that men ſhould lie, and that hiſtory ſhould be falſe, or corrupted, than that any of the eſtabliſhed laws of nature ſhould ever be violated.

In ſhort, it is a reproach on the bulk of mankind, that inſtead of requiring greater and better evidence in religious affairs, than they do in the common concerns of life, they are contented with leſs, and more uncertain: they readily believe, upon the credit of hiſtory, that *Miracles* have been wrought in confirmation of the divinity of their religious ſyſtem; but they ſcruple to allow the ſame teſtimony to be ſufficient in any affair on which their worldly intereſt happens to depend. But this reproach reaches not the *truly rational Chriſtian*, who takes his ſyſtem of religion from nature, and from thoſe parts of the *ſcriptures* which appear to be founded in the *reaſon of things*, and which were originally communicated to mankind by the diſplay of the works

works of their *Creator*, who endowed them with intellectual powers and faculties, capable of diſcovering the harmony, ſymmetry, beauty, order, and propriety of his works; the wiſdom and goodneſs exerted in the conſtruction of them, the various relations which we ſtand in to him, and to one another, and the duties ariſing out of thoſe relations. Surely no miraculous interpoſitions are neceſſary to make theſe diſcoveries to us; and we may rationally conclude, for the reaſons given by Biſhop BUTLER, "That they might do more harm than "good, by rendering doubtful *this natural* "*rule of life*;" and hence, that *human teſtimony* muſt ever fall ſhort of proving that *Miracles* have, at any time, been wrought.

## CHAP. V.

Miracles, *ſo far from appearing to be* neceſſary, *do not appear to be* expedient, *or likely to anſwer any good purpoſe to mankind.*

IN proſecuting the ſubject of this chapter, we are led, for the ſake of argument, ſtill to *ſuppoſe* that real Miracles have

have been wrought, and that the *divine Being* has, on particular occaſions, found it neceſſary to ſuſpend or contradict his own moſt perfect laws, for the ſake of mankind. Under this head, we are to conſider the *ends* which have, in general, been ſuppoſed to be anſwered by ſuch interpoſitions of almighty power, apparently in contradiction to himſelf.

The two principal ends are,

Firſt, *That* Miracles *prove the perſon performing them to be immediately aſſiſted by divine power:* and,

Secondly, *That* Miracles *rouze the attention of beholders, and incline them ſeriouſly to conſider the doctrines and precepts of the perſon who bears this heavenly commiſſion.*

Now, divines, ſuppoſing theſe two ends to be anſwered by Miracles, and that theſe are good ends, are led to ſuppoſe that *Miracles have been wrought*; as if every thing which ſeems to us, at firſt ſight, to be fit and proper to be done, were really done: but the weakneſs of this ſuppoſition might be ſhewn in a thouſand inſtances.

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We ought not, from the apparent uſefulneſs of a thing, to infer its exiſtence; becauſe from the courſe of nature and analogy *we cannot*, rationally, draw ſuch inference. For example, *beaſts* are not *moral agents*, and therefore cannot commit ſin, or be *immoral*, or criminal; yet they ſuffer pain: now it ſeems that it would be good and uſeful to them, not to feel pain, and we can conceive it to be an object of God's power to prevent their feeling pain.

We can conceive it to be in the power of the divine Being, when our irregular paſſions lead us to immoral acts, ſo to impreſs our minds, as to take off the force of the paſſion, by encreaſing the force of a contrary paſſion, or otherwiſe, and hence prevent the evil. This certainly ſeems to be uſeful; yet he has not done ſo, at leaſt, that we can perceive. Therefore the apparent uſefulneſs of a thing, is no proof of it's exiſtence, and hence this argument of our divines appears to be inconcluſive.

When the *Spaniards* diſcovered *America*, and deſtroyed ſo many millions of innocent people in conſequence; it ſeems that it would

would have been good and useful, if God, by a miraculous interposition, had prevented this cruel slaughter: hardly any thing can seem more worthy of his goodness. But he did not do this; and yet how often have priests represented him as interfering in trifles, nay even in fooleries! But farther——

It seems that it would be useful, that all men should be as virtuous as some are, nay that there should be no evil in the world; but the constitution of things prove that it could not be prevented.

In short, it appears to me that the actions of God are determined by general and immutable, and not by particular and variable laws; and that every interposition which affects the conduct of man, so far violates the freedom of man. Now if this was done at one time, why might it not be done at another time? To suppose that God ever does interfere, naturally leads us to suppose that he constantly does so, on all fit and proper occasions. But such suppositions destroy the very idea of intelligence, and sink us into mere machines.

By denying particular interpoſitions, we preſerve our ideas of the juſtice and uniformity of the conduct of the divine Being; as well as of our own *freedom* and intelligence: by admitting them, we deſtroy both, and make the *immutable God* to appear as whimſical and capricious as we are ourſelves. Horrid blaſphemy!

But let us conſider theſe two ſpecious propoſitions in their order.

Firſt then, *that Miracles prove the perſon performing them to be immediately aſſiſted by divine power.* If the *ſcriptures* are to be believed, a very full, though ſhort, anſwer may be given to this propoſition; for from them, we are taught to *deny* that the perſon performing of a Miracle is always aſſiſted by the immediate power of the divine Being; for thoſe ſacred writings inform us, that *Miracles* have been performed by *evil ſpirits*, and, apparently, in confirmation of *diabolical impoſture.* Witneſs, the Devil's taking *Jeſus Chriſt* up into an exceeding high mountain, and ſhewing him all the kingdoms of the world, caſting out devils, &c. &c.

To the ſecond, which is the moſt ſpecious argument advanced by writers in favour of *Miracles*, namely, "That they "rouze the attention of beholders, and in-"cline them ſeriouſly to conſider the doc-"trines and precepts of the perſon who bears "this heavenly commiſſion;" I anſwer,

Firſt, that the doctrines and precepts which we are rouzed to conſider, by the *Miracle*, muſt be *rational* and *moral*; becauſe *ſuperational* doctrines cannot be *conſidered* by us to any good purpoſes.

Now, can we ſuppoſe that God would ſubvert the law of nature, to inform us of the obligations we are under to perform *moral duties*? The *laws, our own ſafety, religious duties*, conſtantly do this: *diſeaſes, misfortunes, death of neighbours, inclemencies of the air*, and "the many thouſand ills "which life is prone to," are ſtanding mementoes from without: the pleaſures attendant on virtue; the pains annexed to vice; the moral faculty or conſcience, that faithful monitor within; all theſe together operate more forcibly than a thouſand volumes of written laws, with ten thouſand

Miracles

Miracles to enforce them; for we have better proof of *these* being from God, than we can have of any book, or any Miracle whatever.

Does it appear conſonant to reaſon, that God ſhould work Miracles to prove the obſervance of the *ten commandments* to be our duty? Can it be ſuppoſed that God would contradict the eſtabliſhed laws of nature, in order to teach us that *we ſhould do to others as we would they ſhould do unto us?* Nothing, ſurely, can be more abſurd than ſuch a ſuppoſition.

Secondly, every *moral* doctrine and precept hath the *ſeal of heaven* affixed to it, nor can theſe want any additional authority; and thoſe who will not believe them without a Miracle, will not believe them with one: for this truth, we have the moſt undoubted authority, even that of *Chriſt* himſelf, who, in the parable of the rich man and the beggar, repreſents ABRAHAM as telling the rich man, in hell, that *if they* (his brethren) *hear not* Moſes *and the prophets*, neither will *they be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead*, Luke xvi. 31. As

if he had ſaid, Your brethren know what the moral law requires, and what the prophets taught concerning it: * If they will not believe and practiſe theſe plain, natural, and well-known duties, *neither will they be perſuaded, though a Miracle ſhould be performed, though a perſon ſhould be raiſed from the dead.* Chriſt, in various other places, ſeems to diſcountenance Miracles, and the expectation of them; and chuſes rather to depend on the *morality* and *uſefulneſs* of his doctrine. Thus, in the 12th chapter of *Matthew*, when a *ſign* was deſired of him, he not only refuſed one, but ſeverely reprimanded thoſe who aſked it; ſtrongly intimating, that *ſigns* and *wonders* would be of no uſe to thoſe who would not regard his moral doctrines.

From the authority of *Chriſt* then, as well as from the reaſon and nature of the thing, *Miracles* are ſo far from being *neceſſary* to enforce moral duties, that they are entirely

* To juſtify this explanation, I here quote the 12th verſe of the 7th chapter of *Matthew*, where it is ſaid, *Therefore all things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo unto them*; FOR THIS IS THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS. This is the moral law, this is what the Prophets taught.

entirely uſeleſs; and therefore the argument made uſe of, in regard to the *rouzing the attention*, is weak, if not abſurd. Such arguments appear to be extremely improper, as they furniſh the beſt excuſes for all the tricks and juggles of *Jewiſh*, *Heathen*, and *Chriſtian prieſts*; particularly thoſe of the *Romiſh church*, who may all plead this uſe of Miracles, either true ones or falſe ones, for the effect will be the ſame; and *pious frauds* are juſtified in that holy Church: but farther——

The belief of the neceſſity and uſefulneſs of Miracles hath been the ſource of much miſchief, in the Chriſtian world; becauſe ſuch belief has been the ſupport of falſe reaſon, falſe religion, ſuperſtition, fraud, impoſture of various kinds, in religious concerns; and therefore a moſt pernicious credulity.

Thus, from reaſon and argument, as well as from the undoubted authority of *Chriſt* himſelf, I hope it appears, that *Miracles* can be neither neceſſary, nor expedient, to enforce *moral duties*; and as for

 any

any other duties, I confeſs, I know not where to find them.

Upon the whole, if *Miracles* are uſeleſs in regard to *moral duties*, as appears to be ſtrongly intimated by *Chriſt* himſelf; well may we ſuppoſe that God would never work a Miracle, in order to eſtabliſh doctrines which are not to be comprehended by our reaſoning faculties; for in ſuch caſe, as Biſhop BUTLER juſtly reaſons, *God's general laws could never after be entirely depended upon; nor would mankind have any certain rule for their conduct; nor be ever aſſured upon proper ground, that any of their opinions were unalterably true.* See BUTLER's Analogy before referred to.

To ſuppoſe that *Miracles* were ever wrought to enforce the belief of *ſupernatural doctrines*, is certainly abſurd; becauſe juſt and rational ideas of *doctrines* appear to be neceſſarily connected with the idea of *belief*; and to aſſent, without ſuch ideas, is to aſſent to nothing: ſuch aſſent, is not *belief*, in the genuine ſenſe of the word; for whatever may be ſaid, or fancied about *belief*, I think it may be, confidently, aſſerted,

aſſerted, that no propoſition which is contrary to reaſon, or not to be comprehended by it, can *poſſibly be believed*.

That *three* perſons ſhould be *one* perſon, in the ſame ſenſe as that in which they are ſaid to be *three*; or that *one* perſon ſhould be *three*, in the ſame ſenſe that he is ſaid to be *one*; ten thouſand Miracles could not make a man believe, whilſt his ideas of numbers continue to be what they are at preſent, and his idea of *belief* be that *of his aſſenting to the truth of a propoſition or doctrine after a fair and candid examination of it*; for an *incomprehenſible* propoſition, or doctrine, cannot be examined, nor the truth of it, by any means, be aſcertained.

But farther; one principal reaſon for our embracing any doctrine, is the apparent *uſefulneſs* of it: now the *uſefulneſs* of *incomprehenſible doctrines* cannot poſſibly appear. If the doctrine that *three* perſons, or beings, * are but *one* perſon, or being, had a tendency to rectify and improve moral conduct, and to make mankind wiſe,



* Mr. *Locke* defines *perſon* to be a thinking, intelligent Being. Vol. I. p. 146, and alſo in p. 447.

pious, juſt, charitable, humane, benevolent, good and happy; they certainly would, originally, have been informed of it, by the beneficent author of their beings, and it would have appeared a part of *natural religion*.

As this is not the caſe; as this doctrine was never taught till after the coming of *Chriſt*, * and as it cannot be a part of the *true, original religion of reaſon and nature*; may we not ſuppoſe that the belief of it can never be abſolutely *neceſſary to ſalvation?* But, on the contrary, that the belief of the *exiſtence* and *unity* of an eternal mind, poſſeſſing all other poſſible perfections, and the knowledge of the relation we ſtand into him and to one another, have ever been and ever will be, ſufficient to render him the ſupreme object of the love and adoration of every rational creature; and to induce us to practiſe all the ſocial duties, in obedience to his laws; unleſs we act in oppoſition to, or neglect, the dictates of our conſciences?

From

* The doctrine of a *Trinity* was, indeed, a Heathen doctrine, but the *Unity*, and *eternal equality* of three diſtinct intelligences, is, I think, *truly Chriſtian*.

From what has been ſaid, then, it ſeems clearly to appear, that *ſupernatural* doctrines are incapable of abſolute evidence; they may be *true*, or they may be falſe, for we know nothing concerning them. But *moral* doctrines are moſt certainly true.

Still there remains one inſuperable objection to the evidence of Miracles, when they relate to the eſtabliſhment of any religious ſyſtem, namely, that they cannot prove for two days together, and much leſs for two thouſand years, that the doctrine and precepts of any religious ſyſtem are propagated in their original purity. Such proof is impoſſible: here Miracles have nothing to do: here we muſt have recourſe to quite another kind of evidence. A *Miracle* may be deemed ſufficient evidence by thoſe who ſaw it performed, but cannot, as we before obſerved, have the ſame effect on thoſe who only hear of it. * The



* The celebrated author of the Independant Wig ſays, "But the truth of a Miracle being done, and "the divine authority by which it was done, cannot "appear equally to any, as to thoſe who received and "ſaw it, for others can have only their words that "they did receive and ſee it." Page 6 of his Eſſays on Important Subjects.

veracity of the hiſtorian, his candour, his judgment, his accuracy, his intereſt; all theſe are here to be conſidered; but above all, the internal ſentiment, the rationality, and the morality of the doctrines are to be examined; if the former appear doubtful, or the latter prove to be inconſiſtent with reaſon, or above it's comprehenſion; they may fairly and honeſtly be rejected, notwithſtanding *Miracles* are ſaid to be wrought in confirmation of them; becauſe ſuch doctrines having paſſed through the hands of fallible men, may, through ignorance or deſign, be miſrepreſented or altered. The farther you are from the time in which the Miracles are ſaid to have been wrought, the more doubtful and uncertain muſt be the evidence; becauſe, as Mr. GORDON obſerves in the above-mentioned Eſſays, "The "more relators there are, who receive it "one from another, the more chances "there are, that ſome of them may miſ-"take or pervert the ſtory, or make a new "one. If the Miracle was ſaid to be done "in a former age, and is conveyed down "by books, then the uncertainty muſt yet

"be

"be greater; becauſe theſe books may "have been corrupted by fraud, ignorance, "or negligence; perhaps wrong tranſ- "cribed by clerks, perverted by editors, "miſtaken by tranſlators; or the books "themſelves might have been foiſted "upon the world, under venerable names, "as we ſee many books often are, and "always have been."

Upon the whole then, it not only appears, that *Miracles* are incapable of proof from teſtimony; but it likewiſe appears, even from the arguments of *Chriſt* himſelf, that they cannot be neceſſary; nay, that they cannot be expedient, or uſeful, in the propagation of a *natural* and *moral* religious ſyſtem.

The great Mr. LOCKE ſeems to be of opinion, that none but a *natural* and *moral* ſyſtem can be divine. "No miſſion, ſays "he, can be looked upon to be divine, "that delivers any thing derogating from "the honour of the one only true and in- "viſible God, *or inconſiſtent with natural* "*religion, and the rules of morality*; becauſe "God, having diſcovered to man the unity

"and

" and majesty of his eternal Godhead, and " the truths of *natural religion and morality*, " by the *light of reason*, he cannot be sup- " posed to back the contrary by *revela-* " *tion*; for that would be to destroy the " evidence and use of reason, without " which men cannot be able to distinguish " *divine revelation* from *diabolical imposture*."

How excellent an argument has this celebrated author here produced, for the use of reason, in our religious concerns! Without it, says he, we cannot distinguish *divine revelation* from *diabolical imposture*. How different this from the reasoning of Bishop BUTLER, who tells us, that Christianity is an *incomprehensible scheme*, and *that our ignorance of it leads us to false conclusions about it*; which, if true, *it cannot possibly be reasoned upon*. Is it not amazing, that two such eminent writers in the cause of Christianity should so widely differ in their opinions concerning it?

CHAP.

## CHAP. VI.

## *Of* CHRISTIANITY.

*Chriſtianity*, as contained in the *New Teſtament*, appears to be a ſyſtem of religion partly *rational* and *comprehenſible*, and partly *ſuper-rational* and *incomprehenſible*.

Now the truly *rational Chriſtian* believes, that the *rational* and *moral* parts of this ſyſtem are, *alone*, the *religion of Chriſt*; and that thoſe other parts cannot belong to mankind; becauſe mankind have no faculties by which they can form any judgment about them, and becauſe they cannot poſſibly conſtitute a *rule* for the conduct of human life.

The truly rational Chriſtian believes Chriſtianity to be a ſyſtem of pure morality, founded in reaſon and nature; and that the *duties* of it being natural and moral, ariſing out of the relations which we ſtand in to God and to one another;

may

may be clearly perceived, by the reaſon of man, to be *duties*.

Doctor SHERLOCK ſays; "The religion "of the Goſpel is the true original reli- "gion of reaſon and nature." In another place he ſays; "The Goſpel was a repub- "lication of the law of nature, and it's pre- "cepts declarative of that original reli- "gion, which was as old as the creation." In ſhort, the ſummary of *rational Chriſtianity* appears to be *piety towards God*, and *juſtice, charity, and univerſal benevolence to every creature that inhabits this globe*: and is, in the Chriſtian inſtitution, all that can poſſibly approve itſelf to the genuine reaſon of mankind. It is the *religion of nature*, republiſhed to the world by *Chriſt*, and, after his name, called *Chriſtianity*. It is that part of the Chriſtian ſyſtem which alone is capable of ſuch kind of evidence as is a proper foundation for *rational belief*.

Biſhop BUTLER, notwithſtanding he afterwards calls it an *incomprehenſible ſcheme*, ſays, that "Chriſtianity is *practical*, and "conſiſts in ſuch a determined courſe of "life, as being what, there is reaſon to "think,

"think, is commanded by the author of "nature, and will, upon the whole, be "our happiness under his government." Here the good Bishop makes it a *natural, moral, comprehensible* system. How to account for such contradictions in a learned, and generally allowed, good man, I know not.

I come next to consider *Christianity* as a *super-rational* and *incomprehensible* system. But, previous to this, I shall first observe, that many, who call themselves *rational Christians*, have endeavoured to make the *whole* of what is called *Christianity* appear *rational* and *comprehensible*, and to reconcile to reason those passages in the *New Testament*, which are, confessedly, beyond the reach of reason. Hence have arisen *exposition* upon *exposition*, *comment* upon *comment*, *illustration* upon *illustration*; as if that infinitely wise Being, who formed the power of conception in the human mind, stood in need of an *interpreter*.

I will not say that it is applicable to rational divines in general; yet I am tempted here to quote what Mr. HUME says, in his

his Eſſay on Miracles, page 147. "I am "the better pleaſed with this method of "reaſoning, as I think it may ſerve to con- "found thoſe dangerous friends, or diſ- "guiſed enemies to the Chriſtian religion, "who have undertaken to defend it by "the principles of human reaſon. Our "moſt holy religion is founded on *faith*, "and not on *reaſon*, and it is a ſure me- "thod of expoſing it, to put it to ſuch a "trial, as it is by no means fitted to en- "dure."

Whoever ſtiles himſelf a *rational Chriſtian*, and would act conſiſtent with the character he aſſumes, muſt look on thoſe doctrines only to be eſſential parts of *Chriſtianity*, which his reaſon can comprehend. All *ſuper-rational* and *myſterious* doctrines muſt be given up by him, and the *morality* of the Goſpel only be allowed to be the religion of *Chriſt*. If he admits more than theſe into his Creed, he forfeits the title of *rational Chriſtian*; for there appears to be no medium: a thouſand *myſteries* may as eaſily be believed as one, and it is amaz- ing that any ſhould, though many ſuch

there

there are, profeſs to believe one *myſtery*, and to diſbelieve another. Thoſe who adore *myſtery*, muſt ſacrifice their *reaſon* at it's ſhrine. At the ſame time *prieſts* will perſuade them, if they can, that ſuch ſacrifice is pleaſing to God: but to believe ſuch ſuggeſtions, requires a degree of ignorance not to be met with, excepting among the moſt vulgar and illiterate. To give up *reaſon*, can never be pleaſing to God; *reaſon* being, in this our ſyſtem, the grand prerogative of human nature, and the nobleſt gift of heaven; eſpecially if, with Biſhop BUTLER, we allow it to be "That "moral faculty, the dictates of which are, "by nature, a rule to us, and ARE MORE-"OVER THE LAWS OF GOD." To give it up then, and take the word of a prieſt, muſt be a crime, an affront to our Maker, and a ſcandal to ourſelves. I now return to the conſideration of *Chriſtianity*, under the notion of its being a *ſuper-rational*, and *incomprehenſible* ſyſtem.

To prove that what is commonly called *Chriſtianity* is *ſuper-rational* and *incomprehenſible*, I might produce the opinions of many

many great and learned men; but I hope that those of Lord BACON and Bp. BUTLER may be deemed sufficient.

Lord BACON has been more particular, in this matter, than any other writer I have met with, as may be perceived by his *Characteristics of a believing Christian, in the second volume of the quarto edition of his works, published by Dr.* PETER SHAW, in 1733. This paper consists of paradoxes throughout; insomuch, that the editor appears doubtful whether it might not be thought to have been intended to ridicule *Christianity*, and on this account he prefixes to it the following preface.

"Some advertisement may be necessary "to prevent a misconstruction of the pre- "sent paper.

"When rightly considered, it appears no "way ludicrous, sarcastical, or prophane: "but with a particular address to be level- "led against that well-meant, but, per- "haps, erroneous practice of mixing faith "and reason, or revelation and philosophy "together; which the author apprehend-

"ed made an heretical religion, and a "ſuperſtitious philoſophy. *Certainly, it* "*may well deſerve to be conſidered, whether* "*reaſon and revelation* * *are not two things* "*that ſhould be kept ſeparate, for the mutual* "*ſervice of both*, the true ends of religion, "and the advantage of civil ſociety; and "whether a contrary procedure does not "occaſion hereſies, foment diſputes and "diviſions, rend the church, diſturb go-"vernment, and ſtop the progreſs of phi-"loſophy."

This preface was certainly neceſſary, as hardly any one, who reads the paper itſelf, can ſuppoſe Lord BACON to have been *ſerious* when he wrote it, or that he did not intend by it to *ridicule* the *myſterious parts of Chriſtianity*, nay, ſome think that

* By *revelation* the *Doctor* certainly here means the *ſuper-rational* and *incomprehenſible* doctrines of the Chriſtian religion; for theſe, being abſolutely above the reach of our reaſoning faculty, muſt of courſe be for ever ſeparated, both from reaſon and philoſophy: but whether doctrines, which are above the reach of our faculties to comprehend, may, with propriety, be called a *revelation from God*, I leave my reader to determine for himſelf: for my part, I think they are not *revelation*.

the Doctor intended the ſame by the preface. If Lord BACON was *ſerious*, he certainly had a very different idea of the term *belief*, from what moſt other learned men have had; for agreeably to the moſt approved definition of *belief*, no man can *poſſibly* believe what he ſays a *Chriſtian* does believe; becauſe, to believe what appears to be a contradiction, is *impoſſible*. Be this as it may, I now give you his own words.

Firſt. "A *Chriſtian* is one who believes "ſuch things as his reaſon cannot comprehend; hopes for things he never "ſaw; and labours for what, he knows, "he ſhall not obtain; yet, in the iſſue, "his belief appears not to be falſe; his "hope makes him not aſhamed; his labour is not in vain.

Second. "He believes *three* to be *one*, "and *one* to be *three*; a father not to be "older than his ſon; a ſon to be equal "with his father; and one proceeding "from both, to be equal with both; as "believing *three perſons* in *one nature*, and "*two natures* in *one perſon*."

Third,

Third. "He believes a virgin to be the "mother of a son, and that very son of "her's to be her Maker: he believes *him* "to have been shut up in a narrow cell, "whom *heaven* and *earth* could not con-"tain: he believes *him* to have been born "in time, who was and is from everlast-"ing: he believes *him* to have been a *weak child*, and carried in arms, who is the "*Almighty*; and *him* once to have died, "who alone has life and immortality in "himself."

Fourth. "He believes the God of all "grace to have been angry with one who "never offended him, and God who hates "sin, to be reconciled to himself, though "sinning continually, and never making, or "being able to make him satisfaction. "He believes a most just God to have "punished a most just person, and to have "justified himself, though a most ungodly "sinner. He believes himself *freely* par-"doned, and yet a sufficient satisfaction "was made for him."

Fifth. "He believes himſelf to be pre-
"cious in God's ſight, and yet loaths him-
"ſelf in his own. He dares not juſtify
"himſelf, even in thoſe things wherein he
"can find no fault with himſelf; and yet
"believes God accepts him in thoſe ſer-
"vices, wherein himſelf is able to find
"many faults."

This paper of Lord BACON's contains no leſs than thirty-four articles of this ſort; but the above five of them will, I hope, be deemed a ſufficient ſpecimen of the whole; and therefore I ſhall not trouble my readers with more; nay, had theſe been written by a perſon leſs eminent than Lord BACON, I ſhould not have copied ſo many.

Let me now aſk any ſerious and candid reader, whether he thinks that the *belief* of theſe things is neceſſary to his being a good Chriſtian? Whether he thinks that God will require ſuch *belief*? Nay, whether he thinks ſuch *belief* poſſible? To theſe queries, I think I may venture to anſwer for him in the negative: and yet we are taught, by our church, that unleſs we believe the ſecond of theſe paradoxes, *we cannot be ſaved.*

*Proteſtants*

*Proteſtants* loudly exclaim againſt Roman Catholicks, for *puniſhing* on account of religious opinions; and yet our Proteſtant church ſuppoſes, that the righteous Judge of the univerſe will puniſh with *eternal miſery* the diſbelief of things which mankind cannot poſſibly know any thing about; when, at the ſame time, an earthly governor would be thought cruel and wicked to inflict the ſlighteſt puniſhment on the ſame account. And thus the *all-merciful God* is put upon a level with an *unmerciful inquiſitor* of the Romiſh Church.

Ignorance is always deemed an excuſe for miſtakes in worldly affairs, eſpecially if it be involuntary, and not ariſing from ſloth. To puniſh a man for unbelief, after he has uſed his beſt endeavours to know and believe, is an exceſs of cruelty. Surely, then, to ſay that God will do this, is *blaſphemy*, even in the mouth of a ſaint. However, this, I think, we may reſt aſſured of, that *the Judge of all the earth will do right*; and notwithſtanding what any *man*, any *ſaint*, any *church* may ſay to the contrary, that man, who ſincerely and faithfully diſ-

charges the duties of his ſtation; who is *pious*, *juſt*, *charitable*, *humane*, and *benevolent*; who uſes his beſt endeavours to promote his own happineſs, and the happineſs of his fellow-creatures, will not *periſh everlaſtingly*, though he ſhould not be able to believe Lord BACON's paradoxes, or *St.* ATHANASIUS's *Creed*; for the underſtanding a doctrine muſt, neceſſarily, be prior to the belief of it: nor can it be any reflection upon a man, of the ſtrongeſt natural parts, improved by the moſt extenſive learning, to ſay he does not underſtand *incomprehenſible doctrines*. The learned and the illiterate, the wiſe and the fooliſh, muſt be all upon a footing with regard to theſe matters; *real belief* is impoſſible to both. The difference between them lies only in this; the weak and illiterate will *profeſs* to believe whatever the *prieſt* tells them they muſt believe; whilſt men of ſenſe and learning know that they cannot believe *incomprehenſible things*, and therefore, if honeſt and diſintereſted, they make no pretenſions to it.

Let us now attend Biſhop BUTLER, who, in general, has been allowed to be a *rational divine*;

*divine*; and we ſhall ſoon perceive that he had very little right to that title. This learned author ſays, in page 272 of his *Analogy*, "That Chriſtianity is a ſcheme "*quite beyond our comprehenſion*." What honour this well-intending divine has done Chriſtianity, by this account of it, I leave others to judge; and ſhall only remark here, that an *incomprehenſible* religious ſyſtem, given by God to man for a rule of life, appears, upon the very face of it, to be a contradiction. How can ſuch a ſyſtem be a revelation or a rule? Can the infinitely wiſe God require a conformity of conduct to doctrines and precepts, not to be underſtood? Surely no.

Men may have various reaſons for rejecting religious ſyſtems, as not appearing to be divine: among theſe, that of the ſyſtem being *incomprehenſible*, may, very juſtly, be one. In ſhort, it appears to me, there can be no better proof that any propoſition, or doctrine, did *not* come from God, than that it is of ſuch a nature as not to be underſtood by thoſe to whom it is ſuppoſed to be delivered. Such perſons might, with great

propriety, say, "I have, with care, candor,
"and impartiality, made use of the facul-
"ties which God hath given me, in ex-
"amining these doctrines, but I find, they
"are to me *incomprehensible*; and therefore
"I am confident, however good they may
"be in themselves, that God could never
"intend them for me: if he had, he cer-
"tainly, as a wise and good Being, would
"have suited them to my capacity, and to
"my faculties: and the knowledge of
"them would tend to make me *wiser*,
"*better*, and *happier*: but, as they are not
"understood by me, my conduct cannot be
"affected by them. The doctrine of the
"*Trinity* may in itself be *good* and *useful*;
"but I cannot find, after the most assidu-
"ous enquiry, that it is so to me, or that
"I can have any thing to do with it.
"There must certainly then be some mis-
"take in the application of it, at least."
Thus might a truly *rational Christian* argue
with Bishop BUTLER in regard to every
*incomprehensible* doctrine contained in the
*scriptures*.

But

But to proceed: Bishop BUTLER, repeatedly, tells us, that "*Our ignorance of* "*the Christian system, renders us incompetent* "*judges, and leads us to false conclusions.*" If this is intended to prevent objections to it, which seems to be the case, the argument is a very curious one, and may be worth examining. Take it in all its force, and it will run thus: "*Christianity* is an *incom-* "*prehensible* system: our ignorance of it "renders us incompetent judges, and leads "us to false conclusions about it; there- "fore no objection can fairly be made "against it."

Now, as we have observed more than once before, a doctrine's being *incomprehensible*, is, alone, an irresistable proof of it's *not* being intended, by the divine Being, as a rule of life for us. Besides, how can the Bishop, with propriety, say that our ignorance of *incomprehensible* schemes leads us to *false* conclusions about them? Men can draw no conclusions from *incomprehensible* doctrines, nor can truth or falsehood belong to them, in regard to us,

But

But ſome have abſurdly aſſerted, that they BELIEVE things, becauſe *they are impoſſible to be true.* Thus TERTULLIAN, a venerable father and a great orator, ſays of the doctrine of the *Trinity*, *Credo quia impoſſibile eſt.* Our Biſhop BEVERIDGE follows him pretty cloſely. SHUCKFORD, in his Connection, ſays, that "*He believes* "*ſacrifices to be of divine inſtitution, becauſe* "*no train of reaſoning could lead men to the* "*uſe of them.*" WARBURTON ſuppoſes the legation of MOSES to be divine, *becauſe* he never inculcated the doctrine of future rewards and puniſhments; which ſeems rather to be a reaſon for it's *not being divine*: as a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments appears to be the moſt uſeful ſanction in any religion. So that becauſe things are *impoſſible* and ridiculous, they are accounted important truths and divine inſtitutions. To what wretched ſhifts are thoſe reduced, who ſubſtitute any thing elſe in the room of reaſon and argument!

That any degree of merit ſhould be attributed to the belief of *incomprehenſible doctrines*, is certainly, to the laſt degree, abſurd

ſurd and ridiculous; becauſe ſuch belief is impoſſible; as, I hope, hath been fully made to appear. But neither can there be any merit in the *bare belief* of *natural* and *moral doctrines*, becauſe as to theſe it is not in our power to with-hold our aſſent. *

Suppoſe an *idiot* was to ſay, by chance, or be taught to ſay, *I believe the doctrine of the Trinity*; would this be accounted *meritorious*, or to be *belief*, in the proper ſenſe of the word? Might we not very juſtly ſay, *It is impoſſible for an idiot to believe or diſbelieve any propoſition*; and give as a reaſon for it, that he has not a capacity to comprehend the propoſition, or to form any judgment, as to it's being true or falſe? Such is the caſe with the moſt learned and ſenſible man in the world, when he ſays that he *believes* an *incomprehenſible* propoſition,

* Dr. WHITBY, in his *Laſt Thoughts*, p. 40, ſays, "*Belief* or *diſbelief* can neither be a virtue, or a crime "in any one who uſes the beſt means in his power to "be informed. If a propoſition is evident, we cannot "avoid believing it, and where then is the merit or "piety of a neceſſary aſſent? If it is not evident, we "cannot help rejecting it, or doubting of it, and where "is the crime of not performing impoſſibilities, or not "believing what does not appear to us to be true?"

tion, or doctrine; for, in this caſe, *he* and the *idiot* are juſt upon the ſame footing.

In this view of the caſe, it muſt be, to the laſt degree, cruel and wicked to *puniſh* a man for not believing *incomprehenſible* doctrines; and it muſt alſo be *moſt horrid blaſphemy* to attribute ſuch conduct to the divine Being. But *ſaints* may think themſelves privileged to ſpeak of God as they pleaſe.

I now hope I have ſaid enough to prove that both Lord BACON and Biſhop BUTLER looked on *Chriſtianity* to be an *incomprehenſible Scheme*. To their opinions I ſhall only farther add *that* of the great Mr. BAYLE, who ſays, in his Exp. of *Manichees*, p. 64, "The *fall, original ſin, election, reprobation, ſufficient grace, incarnation, redemption,* the *Trinity*, &c. WHICH ARE THE FUNDAMENTAL AND CAPITAL DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY, AND PROPERLY SPEAKING, THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, are all inexplicable by reaſon, contrary to it, inconſiſtent with it; or, at leaſt, *incomprehenſible*, and above the reach of our faculties."

From the authorities of Lord BACON, Biſhop BUTLER, and Mr. BAYLE, then I hope it will be allowed that ſome parts, at leaſt, of *Chriſtianity*, taken as they ſtand in the *New Teſtament*, are *incomprehenſible*, and will admit of *no kind of evidence*; for even *Miracles*, ſuppoſing ſuch to have been wrought, cannot prove the truth of *incomprehenſible doctrines*.

## CHAP. VII.

## *Of* ANALOGY.

ANALOGY is founded in reaſon and experience. Things which often happen, we, reaſonably, ſuppoſe will often happen again. Things, which but ſeldom happen, we expect but ſeldom; and events which we have never known to happen, we never expect will happen. But after all, an argument drawn from *Analogy* can amount only to *probability*, and not to *proof*: this, indeed, Biſhop BUTLER allows. What a perſon does in any particular ſituation, we may reaſonably expect him to do again in a ſimilar ſituation: yet, notwith-

notwithstanding this, there is no certain proof that he will do so. But to come nearer the point: let us now consider some of the Bishop's arguments, as drawn from *Analogy*. And first, *that God's leaving us in great uncertainty with regard to the constitution and government of the natural world, is a proof, from Analogy, that he has done so in his moral government.* To support this argument, in p. 6, of his Introduction, he tells us, that ORIGEN has, with singular *sagacity*, observed, that "He who believes "the holy Scripture to have proceeded "from him who is the author of nature, "may well expect to find the same sort of "difficulties in it, as are found in the con-"stitution of nature." I confess I have not sagacity enough to see the force of ORIGEN's reasoning on this head.

The general constitution of nature does not, by any means, appear calculated to gather rules from, relative to the conduct of human life.

Mankind might for ever be left unable to account for many appearances in nature, and yet if God gave them a written rule for

the

the conduct of life, it would be reasonable to expect that *it* should be clear and intelligible. A man who cannot calculate an *eclipse*, or the revolution of a *comet*, might, nevertheless, be clearly and easily informed, that it is his duty to *adore the Lord of heaven and earth, and to endeavour to make himself and his fellow-creatures happy.*

To account for all the different appearances of things in the conſtitution of nature, cannot be *neceſſary* to the happineſs of mankind: theſe appearances cannot be altered by man, nor can they affect his moral conduct: but this cannot be ſaid of a *written rule*, given by God for man's inſtruction. To *underſtand* ſuch a rule, is neceſſary to the *believing* that it came from God. Our not being capable of underſtanding it, as hath been hinted above, appears, to me, to be a better proof, that ſuch a rule *could not* come from God, *for our inſtruction*, than can be drawn from *Analogy*, or even from *Miracles*, to prove that it did.

Let us now try a few of the *incomprehenſible* doctrines of Chriſtianity, and ſee if

they will admit of any proof from *Analogy*. First; it certainly cannot appear from *Analogy*, that the whole human race ſhould be rendered miſerable by the ſin of one man; for though a few innocent perſons may ſometimes ſuffer in this life, by the vices and follies of others; this will bear no *Analogy* with the *eternal death*, as Mr. LOCKE ſtiles it, of the whole human race, for the ſin of ADAM. We can eaſily perceive that God could not prevent one man's ſuffering by the ſins and follies of another, without interrupting the courſe of nature. For example; a vicious parent, of a bad conſtitution, begets an unhealthy child: an extravagant father reduces his offspring to poverty. In theſe inſtances, without a Miracle, the children muſt ſuffer. * But is there the

* This is another preſumptive proof that God never does interrupt the ordinary courſe of nature: for what can appear more worthy a particular interpoſition of the divine Being, than the preſerving of the innocent from ſuffering for, or by, the crimes of the guilty? But the ſufferings of the innocent *for* the crimes of the guilty, through the whole of the Chriſtian plan, from firſt to laſt, is allowed to be conſiſtent with the goodneſs of God. It is the *primum mobile* of the goſpel ſyſtem; and *Miracles* are ſuppoſed to have been wrought by God, to ſhew his approbation of it, inſtead of preventing it.

the same natural connection between the sin of ADAM and the *eternal punishment* of *infants*, not moral agents, for his crime? And yet some divines have been ridiculous enough to assert this.

Secondly, It cannot be proved from *Analogy*, that the death of *one* innocent person should restore all mankind to the favour of God, and to *eternal life*.

Thirdly, It cannot appear from *Analogy*, that because men beget sons, God should beget a son, one only son, and that he should be born of a virgin.

Fourthly, It cannot be proved from *Analogy*, that *three* persons are *one* person, and that *one* person is *three* persons.

Fifthly, It cannot be proved from *Analogy*, that the *belief* of certain propositions and doctrines can be necessary to salvation.

Sixthly, There can be no *Analogy* between a *Miracle* and the constitution of nature: for a *Miracle* contradicts the laws of nature.

Thus, if we were to run through all the *mysterious* and *incomprehensible* doctrines of *Christianity*, we should find that none of

them could even be rendered *probable* by *analogy with the courſe of nature.*

But let us trace the learned Biſhop's argument farther. In page 275 of the work we are now conſidering, ſpeaking of Chriſtianity, he ſays; "And, indeed, we "cannot read a paſſage, relating to this "great myſtery of godlineſs, but what "immediately runs up into ſomething, "which ſhews our ignorance in it; as "every thing in nature ſhews our igno-"rance in the conſtitution of nature." This is much the ſame ſentiment with that which he quoted from ORIGEN, juſt above. I ſhall only remark here, that this is a ſtrange account of a religious ſyſtem, to the truth of which our aſſent is demanded as a term of ſalvation; an account abſolutely inconſiſtent with our ideas of a *rational ſyſtem.*

But to proceed: In page 189, he ſays; "The natural government of the world is "carried on by *general* laws: and though, "for aught we know to the contrary, every "ſingle caſe may be, at length, found to "have been provided for, even by theſe; "yet

"yet to prevent all irregularities, or re-
"medy them as they ariſe, by the wiſeſt
"and beſt general laws, may be impoſſi-
"ble in the nature of things, as we ſee it
"is abſolutely impoſſible in *civil govern-*
"*ment*." I confeſs it appears to me to be an odd way of reaſoning from *Analogy*, to ſay, as is here the caſe, that, becauſe civil earthly governors cannot frame *general laws* which will anſwer the purpoſes of government, therefore it may be impoſſible for God to do ſo. I own it may be impoſſible for *infinite wiſdom* to prevent *evil*, in a world inhabited by free and imperfect beings; but this opinion ariſes from our ideas of *freedom* and *imperfection*, and not from any *analogy* with *civil government*. Whatever earthly governors may be able to do; it is certainly in the power of *infinite wiſdom* to frame general laws which will anſwer the purpoſes of it's moral government, ſo far as to make all intelligent good beings finally happy, in conſequence of their acting right.

Again, in page 432, having ſpoken of the aſſiſtance we meet with from others, in

preventing the bad consequences of our follies, he says; "By a method analogous "to this, when the world lay in wicked-"ness, and consequently in ruin, *God so "loved the world, that he gave his only be-"gotten Son to save it: and he being* made "perfect by suffering, *became the author of "eternal salvation to all them that obey "him.*" How far this quotation from scripture is consistent with the ideas of those who profess to believe the doctrine of the *Trinity*, I leave every candid reader to judge. To the *truly rational Christian*, who takes reason and nature for his guides, it appears very strange, that a *person*, or *being*, said to be, *co-equal* and *co-eternal* with God, should, at the same time, first, be *his begotten Son*. Secondly, that he should be *given*, or *sent*, by God, to save a wicked world. Thirdly, that he should be *made perfect by suffering*. These are all propositions that require a degree of faith, which the *rational Christian* does not pretend to. Nay, the good Bishop himself says; "Indeed, nei-"ther *reason* nor *analogy* would lead us to "think in particular, that the interposition

" of *Chriſt*, in the manner in which he did " interpoſe, would be of that efficacy, for " the recovery of the world, which the " ſcripture teaches us it was: but neither " would reaſon or analogy lead us to " think, that other particular means would " be of the efficacy which experience ſhews " they are, in numberleſs inſtances." Here, again, he applies the experience which we have in little, temporary things, and reaſons from them, by way of analogy, to the important concerns of *eternity*: but this, ſurely, cannot be admitted to be juſt.

That an *eternal God* ſhould SUFFER and DIE, was alway looked upon as a doctrine big with abſurdity, by both Heathens and Chriſtians; and hence aroſe the opinion of *two diſtinct, intelligent natures, one divine and the other human*: a doctrine which has no foundation in the religion of nature, and which is but feebly ſupported by the goſpel. It is a doctrine ſuited to the pride of man; and very probably introduced and propagated by the ſubtlety of prieſts, to cover a greater abſurdity: but how it could enter into the heart of man to conceive,

that HE who created the heaven and the earth, ſhould cloath himſelf with human fleſh; or, as Lord BACON ſays, "That HE "*ſhould have a virgin for his mother, and be* "*ſhut up in a narrow cell; whom heaven* "*and earth could not contain;*" I confeſs, to me, is very unaccountable. Theſe are *incomprehenſible* doctrines, and muſt have ſome other ſupport beſides reaſon and argument.

## CHAP. VIII.

*Containing ſome farther remarks on Biſhop* BUTLER's *Analogy.*

THIS much-admired performance of Biſhop BUTLER's is ſo mixed and complicated, that I can ſcarcely judge, from it, of his *real* ſentiments concerning *Chriſtianity*; and I can juſtly ſay by it, as he does by Chriſtianity itſelf, that *my ignorance in it renders me an incompetent judge, and may lead me to falſe concluſions about it.*

The good *Biſhop* allows that *reaſon* is the only faculty by which we can judge of *any thing*. If this be true, we can have nothing

to do with *ſuper-rational* doctrines, *theſe* being mere *nothings* to us. Take his own words, in page 249, of his *Analogy*: "I ex-"preſs myſelf, ſays he, with caution, leſt "I ſhould be miſtaken to vilify *Reaſon*, "which is indeed the only faculty we "have, wherewith to judge of *any thing*, "even REVELATION itſelf."

This is all that *rational Chriſtians* or *Deiſts* contend for; namely, *that we ſhould judge by our reaſon whatever is offered to us as a revelation from God: reaſon* being the only faculty we have wherewith to judge of *any thing*. Here the good Biſhop ſeems, at once, to give up all his *incomprehenſibilities*, and to ſacrifice them at the ſhrine of reaſon. Yet, after all this, after ſo fairly and fully giving up the point, he falls back again into *ſuper-rational Chriſtianity*, and ſpeaks of *new relations* and of *new duties*, which were diſcovered to mankind at the coming of Chriſt. I would willingly know whether theſe new relations and new duties are diſcoverable by reaſon, or whether they are a part of this *incomprehenſible* ſyſtem which human reaſon can have no-

thing to do with? For my part I own, these *new relations* appear to me to be *incomprehensible*, or rather, they do not appear to me at all. My reasoning faculty, which, according to Bishop BUTLER, is to judge of *every thing*, cannot perceive these *new relations*. I cannot by my *reason discover*, that the relations which we stand in to the *Son* and *Holy Ghost*, are distinct from the relations which we stand in to *God the Father*; and if they are not distinct, they cannot be new. Distinct they cannot be, if it be true, that these *three* divine *persons*, or *beings*, make up that *one* undivided *substance*, *person*, or *being*, which we call *God*. Now if by our reason, which Bishop SHERLOCK as well as Bishop BUTLER says "*is to be our last judge in every thing*;" I say, if by our reason we cannot discover these relations to be new relations; how can we discover the duties arising out of them to be distinct from those which we owe to God the Father, the kind parent of the universe; to whom we are indebted for life, and all its blessings?

Our

Our gratitude to God is a *known duty*, arising out of the *known relations* which we ſtand in to him, as our *father* and *benefactor*: now theſe relations appear, to my reaſon, to be invariable and immutable; and, therefore, that it is impoſſible we ſhould ſtand in any *new* relation to him, *as God*; for *creator* and *benefactor* ſeem to include every other relation. But farther: if the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Ghoſt* conſtitute, or make up, that *one* infinite, undivided ſubſtance, which, in a peculiar ſenſe, we call GOD; then, all the benefits ſaid to ariſe from the agency of the *Son* and *Spirit* may, with great propriety, be aſcribed directly to him; to the one *eternal God*, however denominated or diſtinguiſhed; nor can we be miſtaken when we aſcribe all *honour*, *glory*, *power*, *wiſdom*, *goodneſs*, *might*, *majeſty* and *dominion* to him alone. But on the other hand, it ſhould be ſeriouſly conſidered, that as this is acknowledged to be "an *incomprehenſible ſcheme, and that our* "*ignorance of it may lead us to* FALSE CONCLUSIONS about it;" we may poſſibly be *miſtaken*, and though we cannot be *wrong* in paying

paying our homage and adoration to the *ſupreme God*, we may be guilty of *idolatry* when we pay the ſame kind of worſhip to the *Son* and *Holy Ghoſt*, which we pay to the *univerſal Father*: for this may be giving to another, or others, what is due to him alone. The being aſſured that divine homage is paid to the one proper object of it, is certainly of great conſequence; and it becomes the great concern of every rational being, to employ that only faculty *by which he is to judge of every thing*, in judging of the propriety of paying divine homage to any perſon, being, or thing, beſides God the *Father*, the *creator* and *preſerver* of the univerſe. *

On the ſimple idea of the *unity* of the eternal mind, a rational ſyſtem of religion may certainly be founded. If we go further, we plunge into the inextricable depths of *myſtery*.

Our

* Mr. NYE ſays, the faith of the church is, "that "there is but ONE, infinite, all-perfect, uncreated "Spirit, Being or Mind: who is ſole maker of heaven "and earth; SOLE OBJECT OF DIVINE WORSHIP, "PROPERLY SO CALLED, and whom we uſually de-"ſign by this word GOD".

Our relations to *God*, as parent and governor of the world, are clearly diſcoverable by the light of nature alone; as likewiſe are the duties ariſing out of theſe relations. As for the duties which we owe to our *fellow-creatures*, theſe alſo are clearly to be diſcovered by our rational faculties; and muſt, likewiſe be *invariable*, ſince they, naturally, ariſe out of thoſe primary, immutable relations which we ſtand in to *God*. Our ideas of *one univerſal parent* ſhew us that we are brethren: in like manner, our ideas of the goodneſs of this univerſal parent, and of the unchangeable perfections of his nature, teach us clearly, that he regards the happineſs of his creatures; that it is our indiſpenſable duty *to do to others, as we would they ſhould do unto us*; that as far as we are able, we ought to diffuſe happineſs through the world, and that ſuch conduct will be pleaſing to God, and be productive of our own happineſs, both here and hereafter.

This appears to me to be a ſummary of *Rational Chriſtianity*, or the *Religion of Nature*, republiſhed to the world by *Chriſt*; a ſum-

a fountain of the religion eſſential to man; of *Deiſm*, or the religion of God, "*which is as old as the Creation.*"

The word *Deiſt* hath long been made uſe of as a term of reproach. That the vulgar and illiterate ſhould do this, is not to be wondered at, as they underſtand not it's true meaning and import; eſpecially as they have been taught by Chriſtian divines to look on *Deiſm* to be as bad as *Atheiſm*; as may be collected from their writings on the ſubject.

That *Deiſts*, who profeſs to have nothing to depend upon for preſent and future happineſs, but the mercy of God and propriety of conduct, ſhould be charged with aiming to ſit looſe from preſent reſtraints and future reckonings, is indeed amazing; and yet the eminent Doctor WATERLAND has ſaid, "What *Atheiſm* chiefly aims at, "is to ſit looſe from preſent reſtraints and "future reckonings; and theſe two pur-"poſes may be competently ſerved by "*Deiſm*, WHICH IS A MORE REFINED "KIND OF ATHEISM."

This

This moſt aſtoniſhing aſſertion of the Doctor's hath been very pertinently commented upon by the judicious author of *Deiſm fairly ſtated, &c.* But to ſhew further that *Deiſm* bears no relation to *Atheiſm*, but, on the contrary, that it is diametrically oppoſite to it, I ſhall conclude this little work with the *Creed* of a real *Deiſt*.

## CHAP. IX.

### *The* CREED *of a real* DEIST.

#### ARTICLE I.

THE real Deiſt believes that there is a GOD, an infinite, eternal mind, poſſeſſed of all poſſible perfection, the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things viſible and inviſible; becauſe without an idea of ſuch an eternal, ſelf-exiſtent, independent *firſt Cauſe*, he can have no idea of the exiſtence of any other being or thing whatſoever.

#### II.

He believes that there is but ONE God; becauſe, according to his ideas, the properties, attributes,

attributes, and perfections, *eſſential* to Deity, cannot be divided among ſeveral; nor can any other *perſon* or *being* whatever, with any ſort of propriety, be ſtiled GOD, in the ſame ſenſe that we uſe the word GOD, when applied to the *eternal father, maker* and *governor* of the univerſe; for no other *perſon* or *being* can poſſibly be *eternal, omnipotent, omniſcient*, and the like; ſince every other *perſon* or *being*, in heaven or earth, muſt derive their *being*, and whatever portion they may have of *power, wiſdom*, or *goodneſs*, from *God* the firſt cauſe, who alone is *almighty, all-wiſe* and *all-good*. To ſay that there may be two or three *eternal, omnipotent, omniſcient perſons* or *beings*, according to his underſtanding, is a contradiction in terms.*

## III.

He believes that GOD created every order of intelligent beings, to communicate happi-

* Dr. CLARKE, in his *Evidences*, reaſons judiciouſly, when he ſays, thus; "There muſt of neceſſity be but "*one* God; ſince to ſuppoſe two or more Gods, dif-"ferent, ſelf-exiſtent, independent principles, [perſons "or beings,] may be reduced to a contradiction."

happineſs to them, taking in the whole of their exiſtence; becauſe, being infinitely and eternally happy in himſelf, from the perfection of his own nature, he could have no other motive, conceivable by him, for creating them at all.

IV.

The real Deiſt believes it his indiſpenſable Duty to expreſs, by every rational method in his power, the obligations that he is under to the kind parent of the univerſe, for giving him his *being*, and for his benevolent intention, to make that *being* happy. He believes likewiſe, that it is his duty to worſhip and adore the univerſal father and friend of mankind; becauſe he is the ſole proper object of his adoration, love, and praiſe; and worthy of all, of infinitely more than all, the homage, adoration, gratitude, love and praiſe of every intelligent being which he has made.

V.

He believes it his duty to worſhip God in public, that his example may influence others,

others, and make *piety* and *gratitude* more universal: that he ought alſo to worſhip him in *private*; becauſe his devotion is then more likely to be pure and uninfluenced by worldly motives; and becauſe there appears to be ſomething extremely ſolemn and affecting in a *private* addreſs to that Being, whoſe omniſcient eye can ſearch his very ſoul, and try his moſt ſerious thoughts; and to whom nothing but *ſincerity* can recommend him. He thinks that ſilence adds to the ſolemnity of private worſhip, and that it is beſt performed in places moſt retired from the noiſe of a buſy world.

VI.

He believes that God created *man* a free and *accountable* being; becauſe it appears to him to be impoſſible for an *intelligent* being not to be *free*. *Choice* ſeems to be a natural conſequence of comparing one thing with another, and "*freedom* to be "an adjunct of intelligence."

VII.

He believes that *man*, being an *imperfect* and *free* being, often chooſes wrong; being deceived

deceived by falſe appearances, and hurried on by the violence of his paſſions, which, for the time, pervert his judgment, and give a wrong bias to his reaſon; and hence the introduction of *evil* into this ſyſtem, even under the government of an infinitely powerful, wiſe, and good Being; who, as it appears to him, could not prevent it, without deſtroying all diſtinction between right and wrong action, and without diveſting man of his intelligence, and reducing him to a mere machine.

## VIII.

He believes that God governs the world by *general laws*; that thoſe laws are, like himſelf, infinitely perfect; and that they are calculated, by infinite wiſdom, to anſwer all the purpoſes of the government of *free beings*; becauſe particular interpoſitions muſt deſtroy their freedom. He believes, that as the laws of God are, like himſelf, *perfect*, ſo they are alſo like himſelf *immutable*; becauſe they cannot poſſibly be altered for the better, or any better laws be introduced in their ſtead.

IX.

He believes that the *freedom* of intelligent beings is one of God's general and immutable laws, which he never will ſuſpend, evade, or alter by any particular interpoſition; for though the abuſe of this law has been productive of much *partial evil*, yet, he doubts not, but that, upon the whole, it will produce *univerſal good*; becauſe *conſciouſneſs* appears neceſſary to conſtitute that rational felicity, which God intended mankind ſhould enjoy; as alſo becauſe the rational worſhip of God, which, if not free, and proceeding from a due ſenſe of the perfections of his nature, and of the obligations we are under to him, would have no more merit in it, than there would be in a figure of a man ſo contrived as to expreſs the appearance of bodily worſhip. And thus it appears to him, that the *evil* which is in this ſyſtem, is no argument againſt our being under the government of an infinitely powerful, wiſe, and good being.

X.

X.

He believes that the nature and conſtitution of man was, *originally*, directly and ſpecifically the ſame which it is at preſent; and that man fell not from any *ſuperior nature*, to that which he now poſſeſſes; becauſe he cannot conceive it to be in the power of man to alter his *nature*, either by right or wrong action. Remorſe, pain and diſappointment ever were, and ever will be, the conſequences of acting wrong; and pleaſure, ſerenity and ſatisfaction the conſequences of acting right; and *this* appears to be a general law of God: but that the advancement or degradation of the *nature* of man cannot take place whilſt he remains in that probationary world, in which his maker has placed him, and ſuited to his nature, the Deiſt firmly believes. It requires a *creative* power to give to a being a *new nature*; and the real altering or changing one nature for another, abſolutely different and diſtinct, conſtitutes a *new* and *diſtinct* being; and ſeems to cut off all retroſpect, all concern with the former nature or being. If the original nature of

ADAM was not *human nature*, it does not appear, that *human nature* has any thing to do with what ADAM did. To human reaſon it appears, that man, *now*, can have no more to do with any act of ADAM in *another nature*, than he has to do with the ſuppoſed rebellion in heaven, and the fall of *angels* conſequent thereon. It likewiſe appears to be as *juſt* and *reaſonable*, that man ſhould ſuffer in conſequence of the *fall of angels*, as in conſequence of the *fall of* ADAM; provided that ADAM's nature was not originally *human nature*, or indeed if it was.

## XI.

The real Deiſt believes that he ſhall exiſt in a future ſtate, with a conſciouſneſs of his having exiſted in this; and that he ſhall be ever under the government of the ſame wiſe and good Being, who created him in order to make him happy; and whoſe general laws will, in the final reſult of things, anſwer that benevolent end; and that, after having acquired ſufficient virtue, and paſſed through various trials of life

and death, he believes he ſhall riſe to *glory* and *immortality*: he alſo believes, that this will be the caſe with all mankind, as well as with himſelf; becauſe God ſtands in the ſame relation to them all: all are his offſpring, and, by nature, equally the objects of his paternal regard; and becauſe it appears to him, to be inconſiſtent with all the attributes of Deity to ſuppoſe that any *one* being will be ETERNALLY MISERABLE.*

## XII.

He believes that when man, by the indulgence of his paſſions and the abuſe of his free-

* That very zealous and orthodox Chriſtian, Mr. DODD, ſeems to believe like the Deiſt, in regard to eternal *puniſhment*; for he ſays in a note, p. 16 of his Sermon on Benevolence, preached March 1762; "Let "it here be obſerved that there can be but two reaſons "for *puniſhing*, or for permitting perſons to continue in "a ſtate of ſuffering; namely, for *example* or *reforma*"tion: when thoſe ends are anſwered, *it is as* BAR"BAROUS *as it is* USELESS, *to* PUNISH; *it is ab*"*ſolutely* INHUMAN NOT TO RELIEVE THE SUF"FERER." If this be true, God will not puniſh *eternally*, becauſe *eternal puniſhment* cannot anſwer either of the ends here propoſed by it. I wiſh his note relative to Mr. HUME, in the ſame performance, had been as rational and as charitable as this.

freedom, has been guilty of acting wrong; and has withdrawn himself from *God*, from *virtue*, and, of course, from *happiness*; the only atonement he can make, the only *sacrifice*, acceptable to God, and which he can offer, and the only conduct that will bring man back to virtue and happiness, are *sincere repentance and amendment*: because *God* is the benevolent father of mankind, who desires the happiness of his offspring, and who is ever ready to hear the prayers of, and to receive into favour, the returning penitent. *Man* therefore cannot stand in need of any *mediator* between him and God, his father and benefactor, whose very "nature and property is ever to have mercy "and to forgive," But may *himself* boldly approach the throne of grace, and offer his prayers and adoration *immediately* to God, the only proper object of his worship; for to worship or to pray to any other *person*, *being*, or *thing*, either in heaven or earth, appears to the Deist to be *idolatry*.

XIII.

He believes that the sufferings of an innocent being must, on every account, be dis-

displeasing to God; because it appears to be intirely inconsistent with his attribute of *benevolence*. He believes that *suffering innocence* can never render the guilty *less* guilty; or render God more merciful than he is, in his own nature, *essentially*, and *eternally* inclined to be: on the contrary, it appears to be inconsistent with *God*'s attribute of *justice*; and will be so far from inclining him to *forgive*, that it must tend to increase his abhorence of the guilty.

## XIV.

He believes that *Deists* are no more the favourites of God than *Christians*, *Jews*, *Mahometans* or *Heathens*; that God is the father as well as governor of *all*; and that right and wrong action will be rewarded and punished equally in every religion throughout the world: for *in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him*.

## XV.

He believes that a *supernatural* revelation of *supernatural* matters to mankind, *as a*

*rule*

*rule of life*, is impoſſible; as it amounts to a contradiction; but that the knowledge of the one true God and his attributes, is the beſt and ſureſt foundation of *true religion*; and that our duties to him, to ourſelves, and to our fellow-creatures, are diſcoverable by the light of nature alone.

XVI.

He believes that as God is the parent of *all* mankind, as well as of himſelf, they are *all* his brethren; and as it appears to him, that *God* made them all, in order to communicate happineſs to them, ſo it is the indiſpenſable duty of the real Deiſt to be *humane, charitable, beneficent, friendly, condeſcending, reſpectful, tender and good-natured to all mankind*, notwithſtanding their religious ſentiments and private opinions may be very different from his own; provided that, in the general courſe of their lives, they act virtuouſly and praiſe-worthily.

XVII.

He believes that the promoting the happineſs of mankind is the moſt acceptable ſervice

ſervice which he can render to God, and, indeed, that it is the only way in which a man can, with any propriety, be ſaid to ſerve him; becauſe an infinitely perfect Being can neither gain by our virtues, nor loſe by our crimes; nor can the united praiſes and adorations of all his intelligent creation add one tittle to his eſſential glory and happineſs.

## XVIII.

He believes that his own happineſs will, in general, be beſt promoted by his contributing to the happineſs of others; becauſe a conſciouſneſs of having done this will be attended with a more pleaſing ſenſation, in all good minds, upon cool reflection, than any ſenſual gratification can poſſible yield; and becauſe, as far as our natures will admit of it, we thereby aſſimilate ourſelves to the divine Being, *who is good to all, and whoſe tender mercies are over all his works.*

## XIX.

He likewiſe believes, as he is one of that *whole* which God created to make happy,

that it is alſo his duty to promote his own happineſs, and that it will be pleaſing to God that he ſhould do ſo whenever it can be done without leſſening the happineſs of others: nay, when every thing elſe is equal, he believes that he may prefer his own happineſs, and the happineſs of his family, to that of others, becauſe nature teaches him ſo to do; for though all mankind ſtand exactly in the ſame relation to *God*, yet among one another of the human race, all have not an equal claim to our affection: ſome, by nature, will be more nearly allied to us than others, and therefore nature prompts us to begin, in the diffuſions of our benevolence, with our families; then to diſpenſe it to our friends and more diſtant relations; next to our country, or to the community to which we belong; and finally "We ſhould poſſeſs "that extenſive benevolence, that diffuſive "ſpirit of beneficence which takes in the "whole world; *all* ſhould partake, at "leaſt, of our ardent prayers and wiſhes "for their happineſs, where more is not "in our power."

## XX.

Finally. The real Deiſt believes that the foregoing articles contain a ſummary of the true, original religion of reaſon and nature, which God implanted in the heart of his creature man, in order to guide him in the road to happineſs; and he believes that this religion would have anſwered all the benevolent purpoſes of the Deity, if it had never been corrupted and adulterated by intereſted men. That it is a religion of *things*, and not of unmeaning or many meaning *words*; of the heart, and not of the letter; and he hopes that piety towards God, and juſtice, charity and univerſal benevolence to his fellow-creatures, will ever witneſs it's purity; and that by a ſteady and conſtant adherence to the dictates of reaſon and nature, he ſhall always deſerve the glorious title of

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